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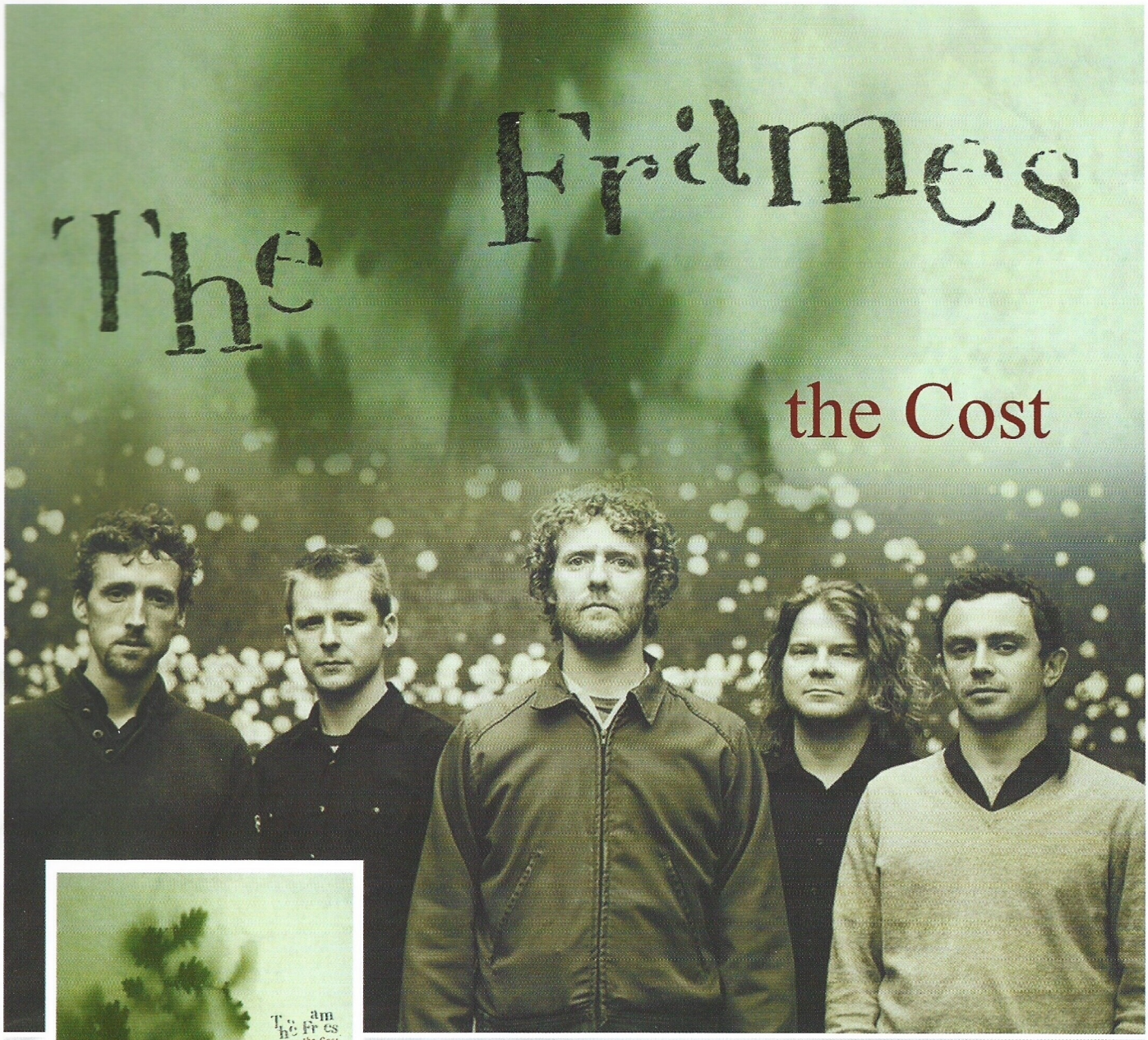

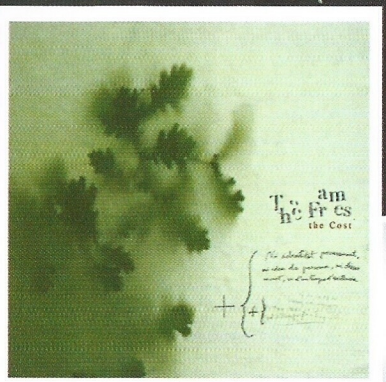

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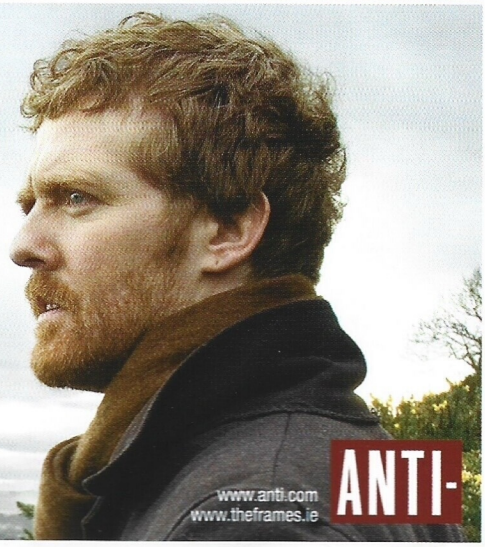

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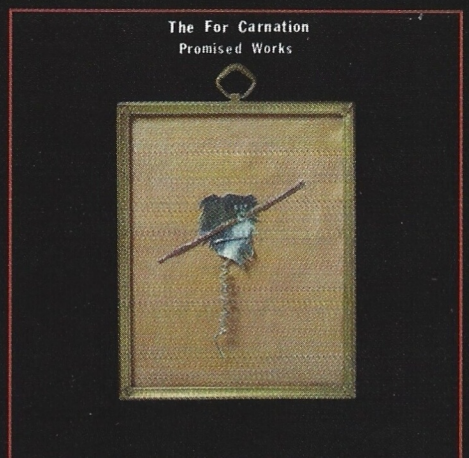

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Blake Morgan
Burning Daylight

Blake Morgan returns to the national spotlight with his already critically-acclaimed new solo album, *Burning Daylight*, recorded and produced in collaboration with 2005 Grammy Award-winner Phil Nicolo (Butcher Bros.). "He's got killer pop-rock instincts," says **The Washington Post**, "a natural when it comes to fashioning sharp melodies and catchy choruses." These instincts are exemplified on Morgans newest effort, where he continues to blend whip-smart lyric writing with unforgettable melodies and modern, guitar-laden arrangements. "Morgan has a voice that was made to be heard on the radio." – **Billboard Magazine**

www.enginecompanyrecords.com

Dave Rave & Mark McCarron
In The Blue Of My Dreams

Dave Rave and Mark McCarron first galvanized their love of jazz, pop, Ravel and Debussy with their 2002 CD release *Another Side Of Love*. Dave and Mark **continue to push the jazz/pop envelope by incorporating woodwinds and strings; taking their experiments into the outskirts of post-bop traditionalism** with this new CD, featuring such NYC jazz players as Matt Ray (piano), Joe Bussey (bass) and Stefan Schatz (drums) and the woodwinds/string players from the Toronto Symphony – **a subdued and sophisticated sound.**

"Dave creates lush, jazz/blues-inflected work and shows off his Sinatra-esque crooning prowess on a lovely version of 'The Song Is You'. Even better, though, are the original songs: the gorgeously resigned 'At The End Of Day'..."
– Whisperin & Hollerin, UK

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Ari Shine
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"Shine is a classic power popster of the stripped down new wave tense type, who sounds a good deal like 1977-1979 Elvis Costello when he was spitting hard into microphones and front rows-with shards of Joe Jackson, Graham Parker, Fabulous Poodles, Jags, Records, 20/20 and Nick Lowe. Accordingly, old psychedelic shack dweller and **original Sparks member Earle Mankey** (**vintage Three O'Clock, Kristian Hoffman**) **is the appropriate producer** to bring out the phlegm in Shine's anxious delivery and the gnarl in his post punk guitars." – **Big Takeover (Editor Jack Rabid)**

www.bongobeat.com

The Autumn Defense
The Autumn Defense

For their third album, self-titled *The Autumn Defense*, **Pat Sansone and John Stirratt took some time away from their duties as members of Wilco to write and record new material in Chicago**. They reconvened with Autumn Defense regulars from the last six years: drummer Greg Wieczorek, and producer/session man Brad Jones, pedal steel player John Pirruccello and horn player Steve Tyska. The result was a collection of thirteen expertly crafted songs of mellow, sophisticated and soulful soft-pop that Rolling Stone magazine is hailing as "warm, gorgeous and delightful." The Autumn Defense is the culmination and continuation of what the band has reached for in the last two records, from Philly-soul to baroque to bossa-nova to the classic Southern-California sound.

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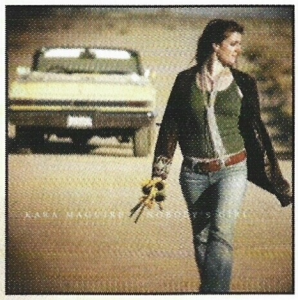

Kara Maguire
Nobody's Girl

Thirty year old Kara Maguire was born and raised on the east coast where she studied singing and drama. She came to Hollywood to pursue a career as a singer/songwriter. After playing the Los Angeles club circuit for several years she turned to one of her first loves, Blues Music. **Influenced by Etta James, Koko Taylor and Bonnie Raitt**, she threw herself into the current blues project. With her hot Los Angeles blues band, Maguire keeps the tradition alive with this CD of 11 blistering original blues tunes with influences from Chicago and the Mississippi Delta.

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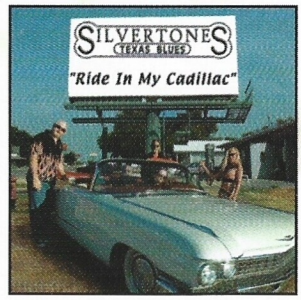

The Silvertones
Ride In My Cadillac

The latest CD release from this Texas based blues band showcases the various styles of blues that they have entertained their audiences with for the past ten years. **They have been voted "Best Blues Act" by the Dallas Observer for the last six years.**

"Silvertones offer upbeat Texas blues stamped with the clear-toned lead guitar of Leo De La Vega and the bouncy, almost rockabilly rhythms of Linn Roath. Drummer Randy Ball is an engaging lead vocalist whose stick work is crisp. Smokin' Joe Kubek lends his estimable guitar talent to three tracks."
-Blues Revue

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FEATURES

74 RILO KILEY

Jenny Lewis and Blake Sennett sat down with WES ORSHOSKI to discuss the much-anticipated new Rilo Kiley album *Under the Blacklight*. Yet as both musicians—ex-lovers, incidentally—have also tested the solo waters, talk turned, inevitably, to the long-term future of Rilo Kiley. "I truly can't say what's going to happen," said Lewis, cryptically. "Whatever feels best will outlive the others. Whatever creates a free environment and whatever renders the best records will hopefully be the thing that carries on in the end."

80 EISLEY

Tyler, Texas, is a small town not far from Dallas—boasting, as TREVOR KELLEY found, more Christian music stations on its FM dial than modern rock. It's also the home base of pop upstarts Eisley, and as the group of siblings explained to Kelley, "[We've] turned into this thing that people are fascinated by. But how boring would it be if they realized that we're just out in this small town writing music together?"

84 WHAT'S SO FUNNY ABOUT R 'N' R?

How many cutting edge comedians does it take to change a lightbulb for *Harp*? We lost count, actually, somewhere around the 20th page of this issue's cover story, wherein we chart the provocative, oftentimes inscrutable, always fascinating intersections between funnybone-ticklin' and rockin' 'n' rollin'. (Warning: Rude Language Alert!) From stand-up mavericks and Comedy Central nutjobs to a round-up of essential comedy albums and an appreciation of classic comedy duos, it's all here. Rock, rot and rule, baby.

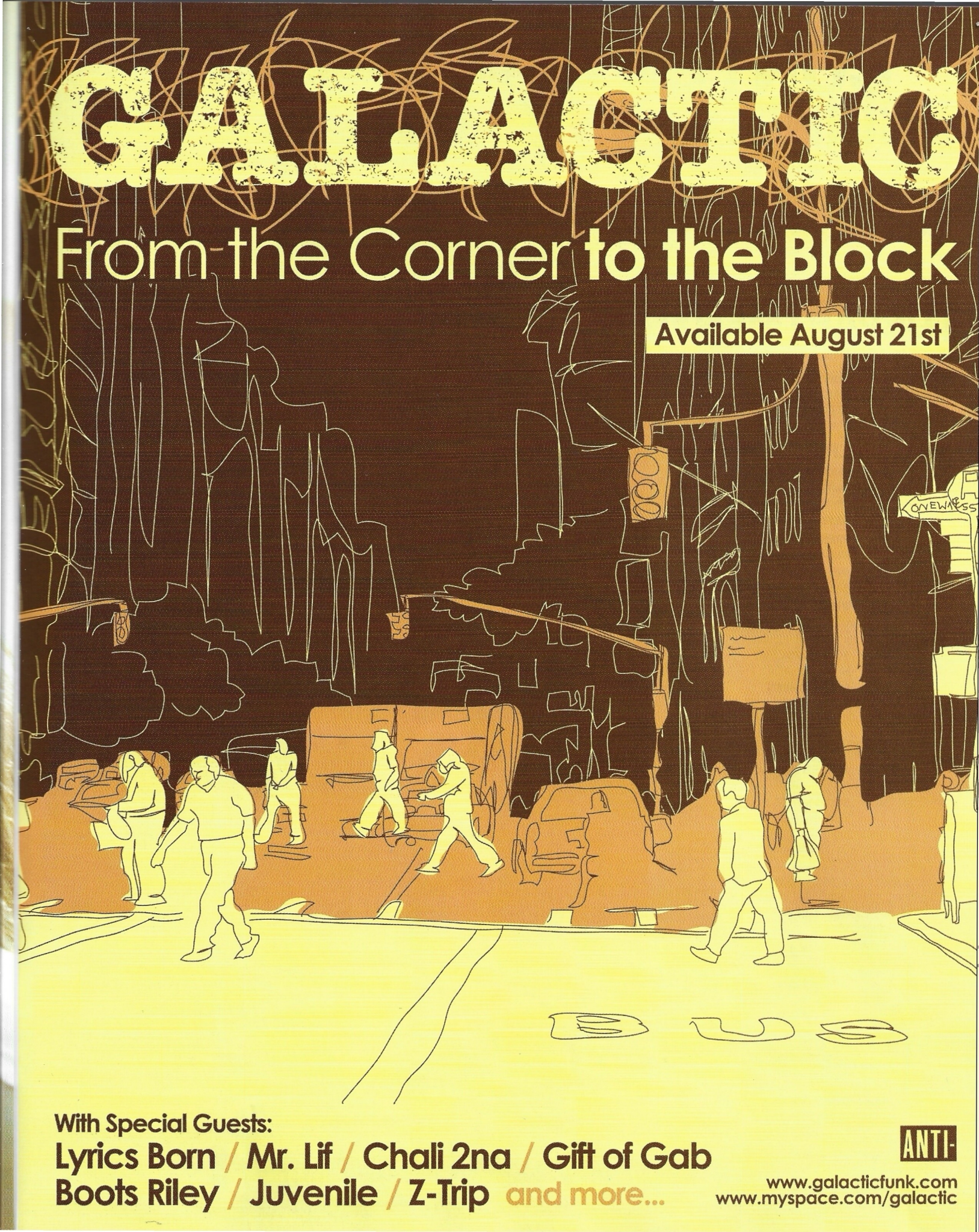
106 KT TUNSTALL

"My spirit has been fortified, my whiskey has aged," KT Tunstall told MARK GUARINO, on what it feels like to sell millions of her debut *Eye to the Telescope* and to find her career go from zero to sixty in a heartbeat. "I didn't need that album to sell four million copies, that wasn't really a plan; I just needed to get the music out. What that massive success has afforded me is confidence. I feel really brave."

ON THE COVER: HARP's fave comedians of comedy—David Cross, Patton Oswalt, Eugene Mirman and Flight Of the Conchords (Jemaine Clement & Bret McKenzie)—were photographed in New York City by Christopher McLallen exclusively for HARP.

CHRISTOPHER MCLALLEN

CARLA BRUNI 23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AZIZ ANSARI

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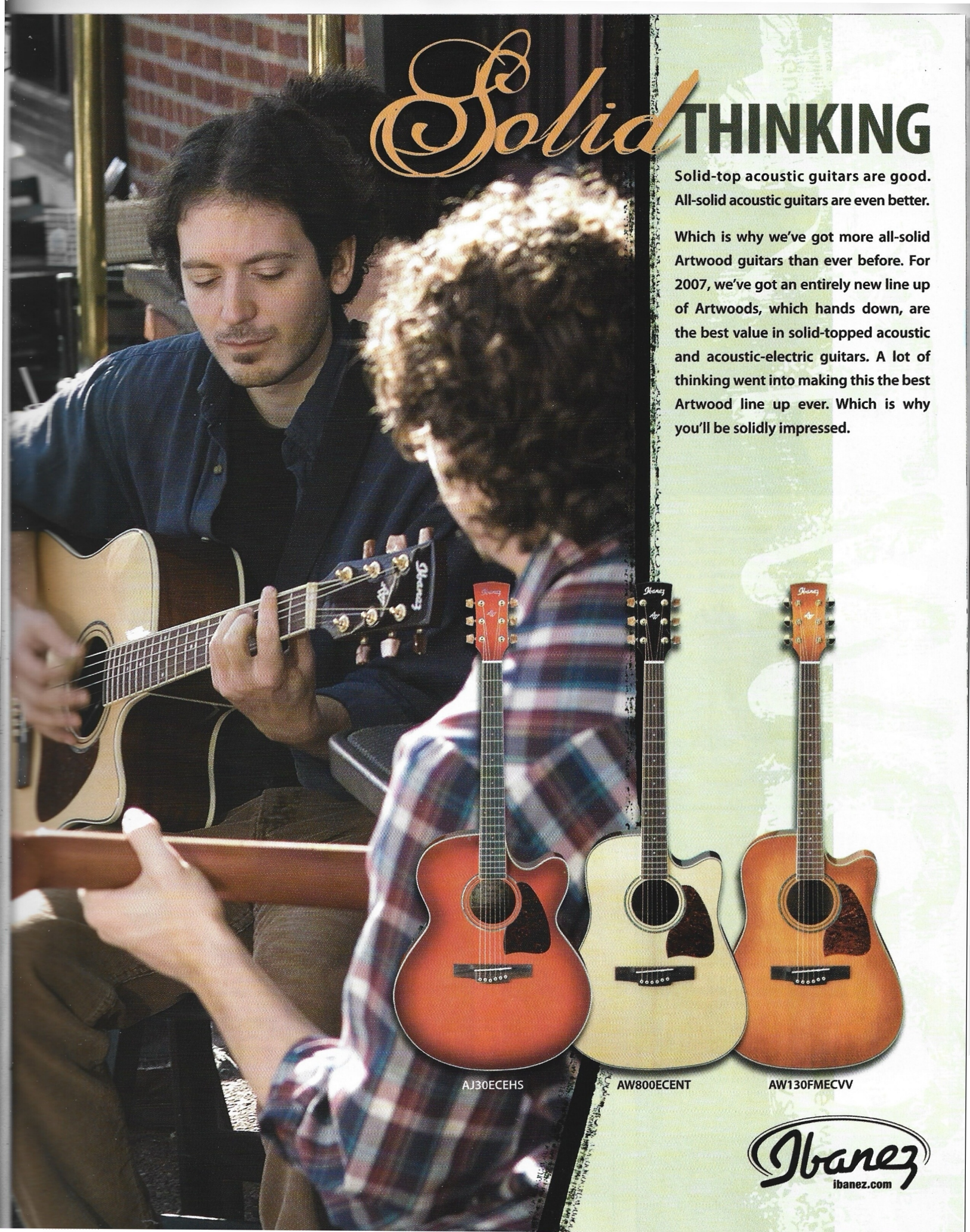

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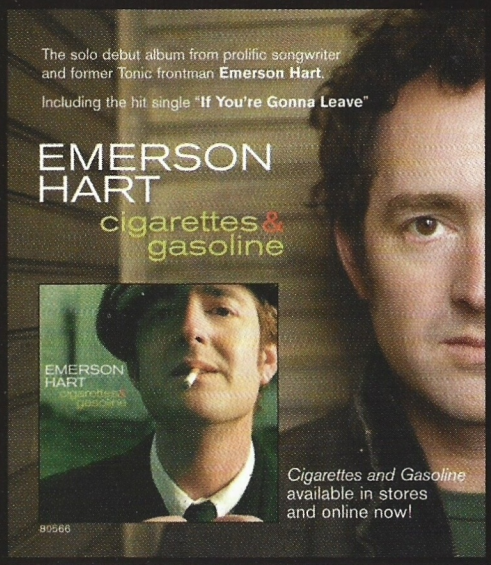
The solo debut album from prolific songwriter and former Tonic frontman **Emerson Hart**.
Including the hit single "**If You're Gonna Leave**"
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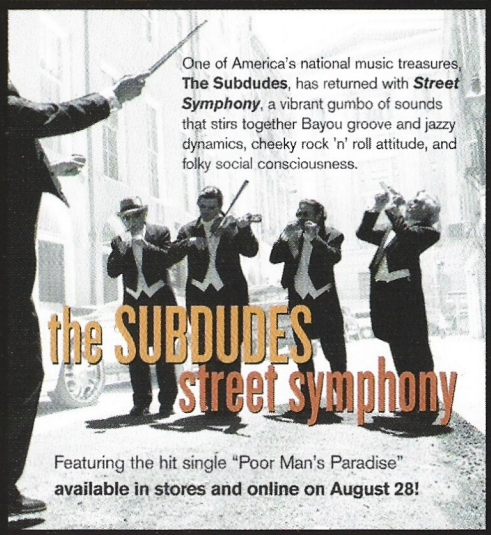
One of America's national music treasures, **The Subdudes**, has returned with ***Street Symphony***, a vibrant gumbo of sounds that stirs together Bayou groove and jazzy dynamics, cheeky rock 'n' roll attitude, and folky social consciousness.
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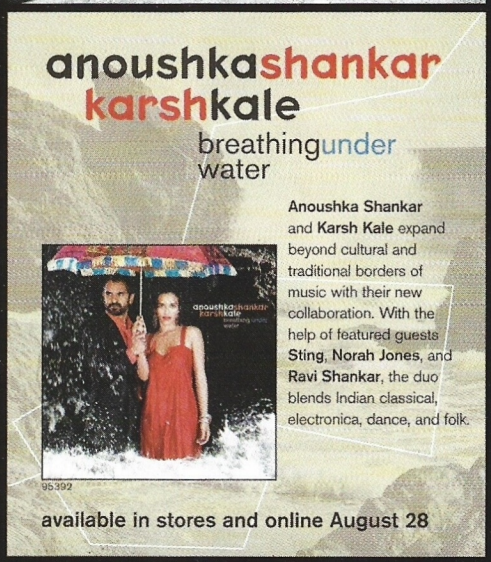
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karshkale
breathingunder water
Anoushka Shankar and **Karsh Kale** expand beyond cultural and traditional borders of music with their new collaboration. With the help of featured guests **Sting**, **Norah Jones**, and **Ravi Shankar**, the duo blends Indian classical, electronica, dance, and folk.
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EDITOR-IN-CHIEF/ART DIRECTOR Scott Crawford
scrawford@harpmagazine.com

MANAGING EDITOR Fred Mills
fmills@harpmagazine.com

ASSOCIATE EDITOR Randy Harward
rharward@harpmagazine.com

EDITORS AT LARGE Mark Kemp, Rodger Cambria

PROOFREADER Pamela Murray Winters

CONTRIBUTING WRITERS
Matt Allen, Rick Allen, A.D. Amarosi, Robert Baird, Brian Baker, Ron Bally, Greg Barbera, Jonah Bayer, Hal Bienstock, Zachary Bloom, Bryan Borzykowski, Brian L. Bowe, Nicholas Breul, Mark Brown, Edward Burch, Rodger Cambria, Fred Cisterna, Jake Cline, Byron Coley, Dennis Cook, Sandi Crawford, Kandia Crazy Horse, Pamela Des Barres, Tim Donnelly, Scott Dudelson, Chuck Eddy, Mike Edison, Jason Ferguson, Pat Fitzgerald, Benjamin Friedland, Gillian G. Gaar, Dante Garland, Andrew Gilbreath, Holly Gleason, Allie Goolrick, David Greenberger, Jason Gross, Mark Guarino, Evan Haga, Melanie Haupt, Steve Hyden, Mark Jenkins, Aaron Kayce, Hayley Elisabeth Kaufman, Trevor Kelley, Jennifer Kelly, Matt Kivel, Steve Klinge, Gregg Lagambina, John D. Luerssen, Megan Martin, Jose Martinez, Ed Masley, Steve Matteo, Mike McKee, Brian McManus, Barbara Mitchell, Tom Moon, Stuart Munro, Brian Orloff, Kurt Orzeck, Wes Orshoski, Chris Parker, J. Poet, Mia Quagliarello, Steve Rosen, Tony Sclafani, John Schacht, Julie Simmons, Jason Matthew Smith, David Sprague, Tim Stegall, Denise Sullivan, Jeff Tamarkin, Andy Tennille, Jim Testa, Doug Wallen, Greg Walton, Crystal K. Wiebe, Pamela Murray Winters, Jon Wurster, Adrian Zupp, Jonathan Zwickel

CONTRIBUTING PHOTOGRAPHERS
Jay Blakesberg, Johnny Buzzerio, Danny Clinch, Steven Dewall, Autumn DeWilde, Anthony Saint James, Phil Mucci, Edward Smith

PRODUCTION DIRECTOR Lollo Schnittger Nylen
production@harpmagazine.com

PRODUCTION ASSOCIATES Lisa Parker-Loan, Matt Rippetoe

PUBLISHER Lee Mergner
lmergner@harpmagazine.com

ASSOCIATE PUBLISHER & ADVERTISING SALES MANAGER Jake Flack
jflack@harpmagazine.com

ONLINE PUBLISHER Chris Lewis
clewis@harpmagazine.com

MUSICAL INSTRUMENT ADVERTISING SALES Jeff Sabin
jsabin@harpmagazine.com

CIRCULATION MANAGER Wayne S. Kline
wkline@harpmagazine.com

INFORMATION TECHNOLOGIST Henry Achmad (MCSE)

NEWSSTAND DIRECTOR Howard White

ADMINISTRATIVE ASSOCIATE Nicholas Breul

CONTROLLER Henry Achmad

ACCOUNTS RECEIVABLE SPECIALIST Dan Mitchell

INTERN Kate Leary, Adaora Otiji

Harp is a division of Guthrie, Inc.
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HARP
8737 Colesville Road, Ninth Floor
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ISSN# 1536-1438
PRINTED IN CANADA

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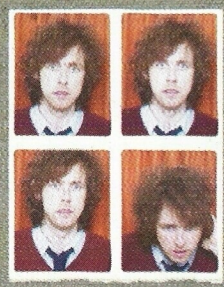
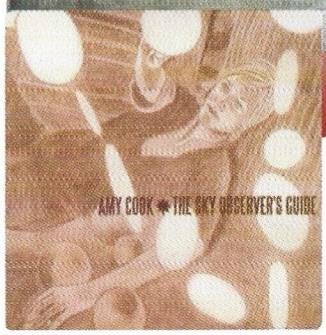
stand out in the shuffle

2

Simple Kid



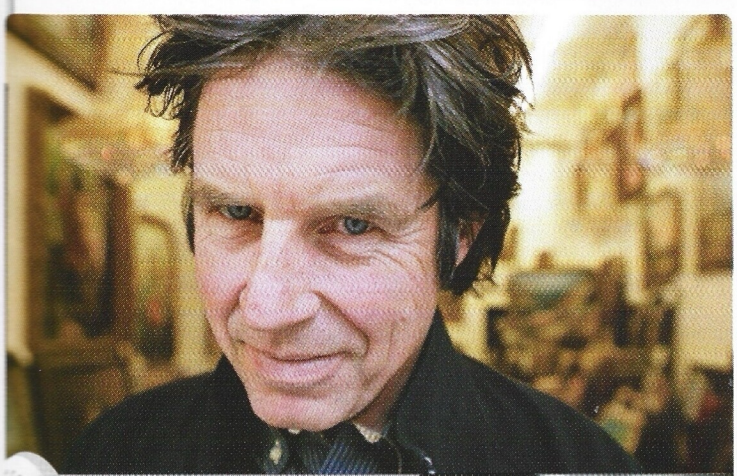
While it still retains many of the memorable features that jolted critics and fans on his first outing, *2* moves SIMPLE KID'S sound in a more earthy direction, with linear sonance and focused production: less laptop, more guitar, harmonica and banjo. However, he still knows how to throw a party with tracks like "Lil' King Kong" and "Serotonin".



THE SKY OBSERVER'S GUIDE

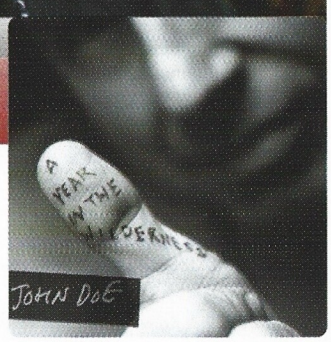
Amy Cook

AMY COOK sees something unique up there, but the altFolk singer-songwriter isn't content simply marveling at the enormity of what lies beyond earth. On *The Sky Observer's Guide*, she tells simple, bittersweet, earthbound stories, refracted through the panoramic scope of the heavens.

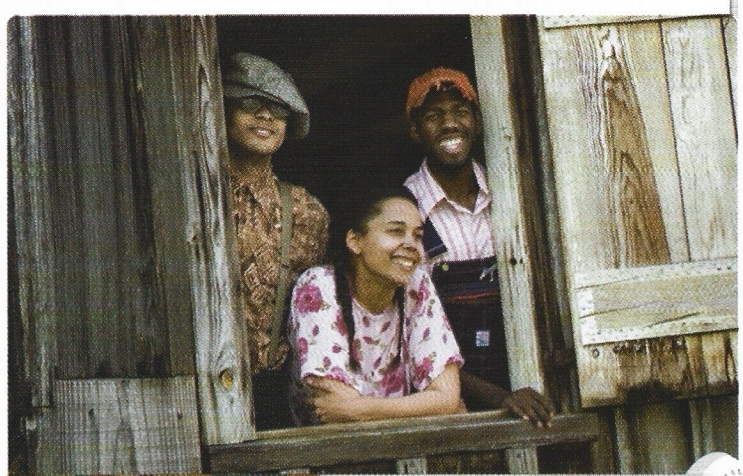


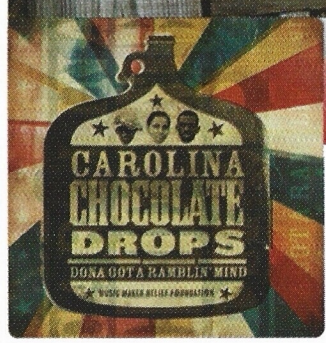
A YEAR IN THE WILDERNESS

John Doe



JOHN DOE seizes his rightful place as one of the most influential artists in American alternative music. With *A Year in the Wilderness*, Doe continues his acclaimed solo career bringing along friends like DAVE ALVIN, JILL SOBULE, KATHLEEN EDWARDS, DAN AUERBACH (from The Black Keys), GREG LEISZ and AIMEE MANN along for the dusty, rocking ride.





DONA GOT A RAMBLIN' MIND

Carolina Chocolate Drops

Few people think of old-time string band music. But the antebellum combination of banjo and fiddle used to be a tradition in most black communities in the south. The CAROLINA CHOCOLATE DROPS are a group of young African-American stringband musicians that have come to together to play the rich tradition of fiddle and banjo music in Carolinas' piedmont.

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ANDREW EARLES

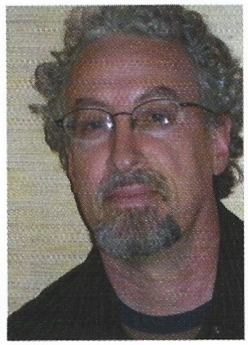
"Tom Scharpling and Jon Wurster were the easiest interview I ever did," says Andrew Earles. For almost five years, Earles was also a caller to Scharpling's *Best Show on WFMU*, playing multiple characters. "Jon's were always much funnier, though, proving I should stick to writing. Along with Patton Oswalt and David Cross—who I also interviewed for this issue—Scharpling and Wurster will save the comedy album."
A resident of Memphis, Earles co-created the *Just Farr A Laugh* prank phone call series, which Matador Records will release as a deluxe 2-CD set this fall.

CHRISTOPHER MCLALLEN

New York-based photographer Christopher McLallen's work has appeared in such publications as *The London Sunday Times Magazine, Entertainment Weekly* and *New York Magazine*. He recently made his directorial debut with music videos for Sony Red Label and *T: The New York Times Style Magazine*. "Shooting this month's cover was a blast!" says McLallen. "David, Eugene and Patton are all old friends; initially they spent time catching up quietly. Once they all stepped onto the set together they were this whirlwind of laughter and energy, playing off on another and including the bewildered Conchords in their antics. We were all in hysterics."

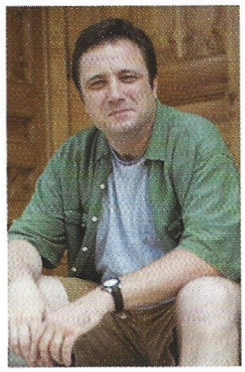
AUTUMN DE WILDE

The first time Autumn de Wilde shot Eisley was at their house in Tyler, Texas. For the *Harp* session, however, she shot them at her home in L.A. "The band had taken a really early flight from Texas," recalls de Wilde, "so they were exhausted. But I served them a big breakfast when they arrived and put on some funny old record from an old '80s roller-skating movie—and they all perked up." The veteran photographer has portrayed scores of acclaimed artists, her work appearing regularly in *Vanity Fair, Harp, Spin, Elle, Rolling Stone* and more. Her first book, *Elliott Smith*, will be published in November by Chronicle Books.



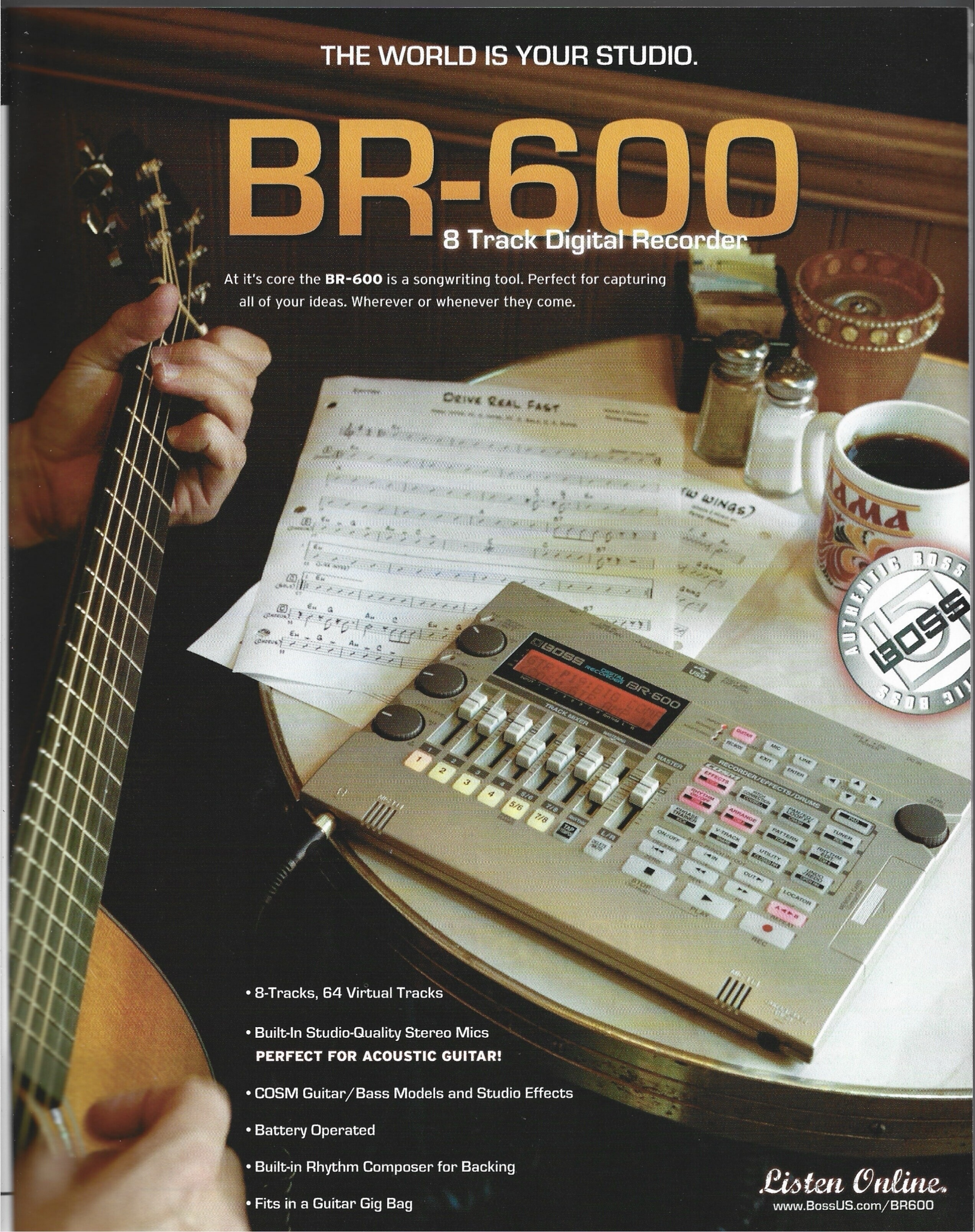
JOHN SCHACHT

"People forget that Sam Beam's stage name, Iron & Wine, was inspired by the ingredients on a bottle of supplements, not William Faulkner or Flannery O'Connor," says John Schacht. "Point being, he's not really the brooding poet type some might assume; hell, he's got four kids, so he better have a sense of humor. I'd interviewed Sam previously, but found him more comfortable with the process this time around. Or maybe my questions weren't as dumb." Schacht is the editor of the new Carolinas' music freebie, *SHUFFLE*, and a frequent contributor to Allmusic.com and several alternative weeklies.



MARK GUARINO

Mark Guarino is the pop music critic for the *Chicago Daily Herald* and regularly writes for *Chicago Magazine, People, No Depression* and many other publications. On covering KT Tunstall this issue, he says, "I was surprised to learn about her love of Chicago. She beelined it here after college to hang with the Deadheads outside Soldier Field for the band's now-legendary final shows and was given a bicycle tour of the city by a local graffiti artist. If I had known, I would have been happy to have volunteered myself."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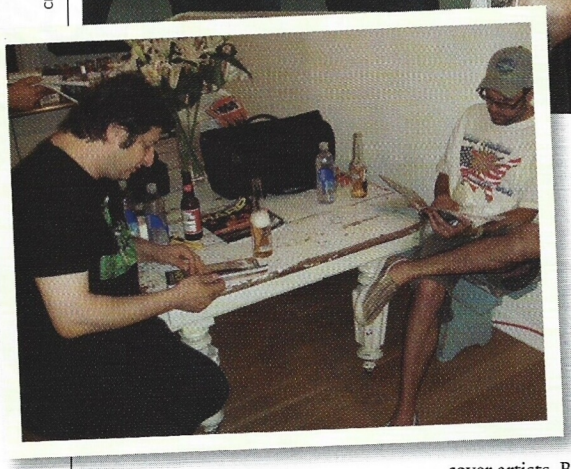
Laugh riot (from the left): Eugene Mirman, Jemaine Clement, David Cross, Patton Oswalt, HARP editor Scott Crawford, and Bret McKenzie

CHRISTOPHER MCLALLEN



A FUNNY THING HAPPENED...

HAVE YOU LAUGHED much lately? No, I mean *really* laughed. I hate to spoil this party, but let's face it folks: things ain't pretty. Between inflated gas prices, a war criminal in office, a record industry hellbent on imploding, and those Flock of Seagulls-by-way-of-Warped Tour-haircuts that make me feel so old, my laughlines haven't been getting much of a workout lately. The last time I even cracked a smile was at the news of Jerry Falwell joining that great (Im)moral Majority in the sky (and that was months ago!), so perhaps that's why we chose to go with this issue's comedic cover artists. Because, honest to god, these guys make us laugh. Hard.

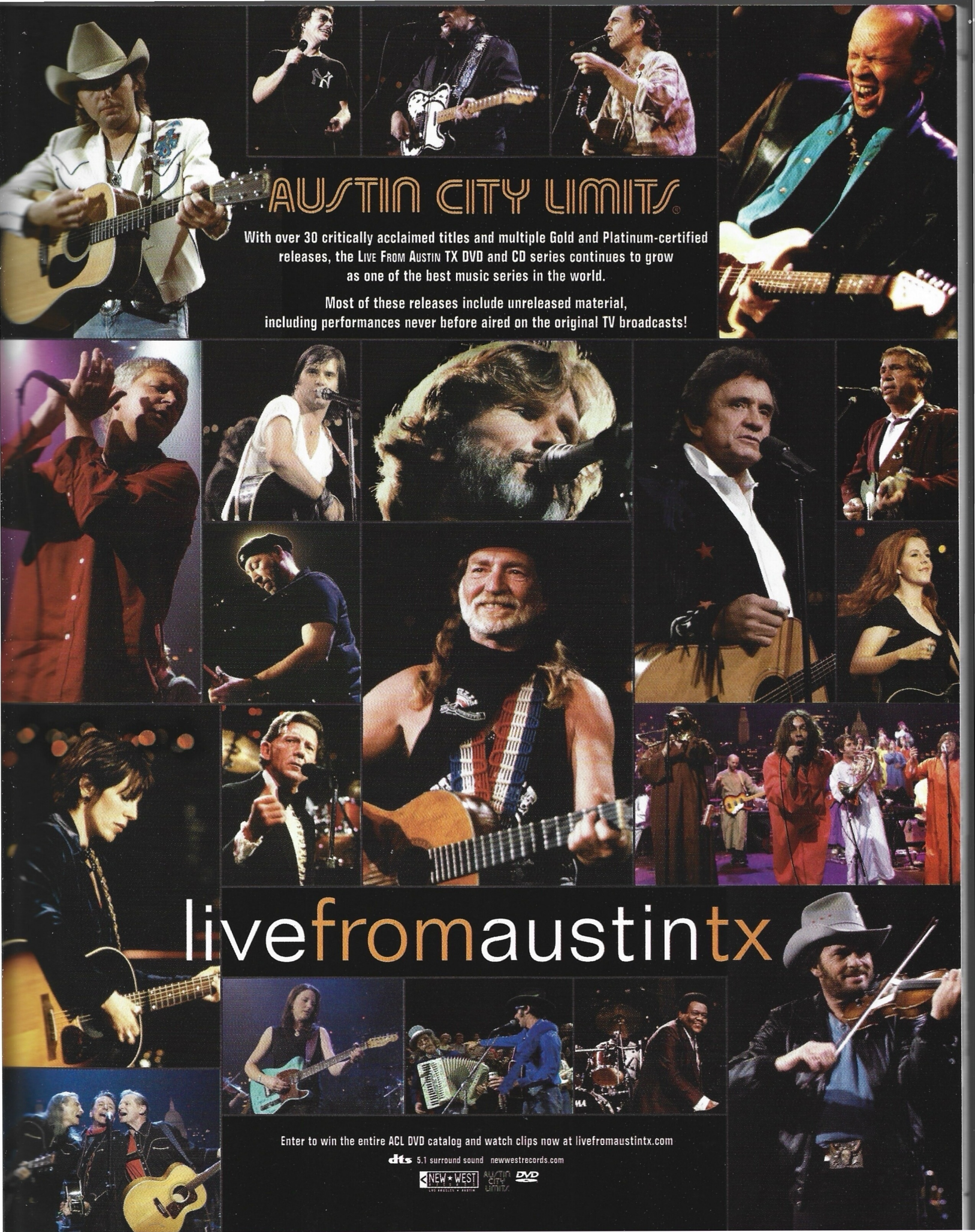
David Cross, Patton Oswalt, Eugene Mirman and the Flight of the Conchords' Bret McKenzie and Jemaine Clement are the best examples of what we think is really daring, really inventive and really DANGEROUS about the intersection of comedy and rock 'n' roll. It's not the first time the lines have blurred. After all, in his heyday, Lenny Bruce's devil-may-care swagger and razor wit were just as ROCK in spirit as Bob Dylan or Arthur Lee. But it's the reason we had all of them convene for a very exclusive photoshoot in New York recently.

Our cover subjects could probably name every Pavement B-side ever recorded—these are guys with both feet planted firmly in the alt-world. And as a result, they've earned the luxury of playing rock clubs and festivals (Bonnaroo has had its own comedy stage for several years now) to a rabid fanbase that'd otherwise probably never set foot in your local Comedy Hut.

We've devoted over 20 pages of what we think is a pretty comprehensive coverage of the current comedy landscape with artists both young and old. Included are several contributions from notables like George Carlin and *Saturday Night Live*'s Fred Armisen as well as newcomers like Heather Lawless and Aziz Asnari (whose Q&A with hip-hop starlet M.I.A. is priceless). And lest you think we've got little to offer in the way of music coverage this issue, thumb your way to our features on Rilo Kiley (page 74), Iron & Wine (66), Eisley (80) and our usual (over)abundance of CD, DVD and book reviews for reassurance.

Plenty to smile about, to be sure.

SCOTT CRAWFORD
EDITOR/ART DIRECTOR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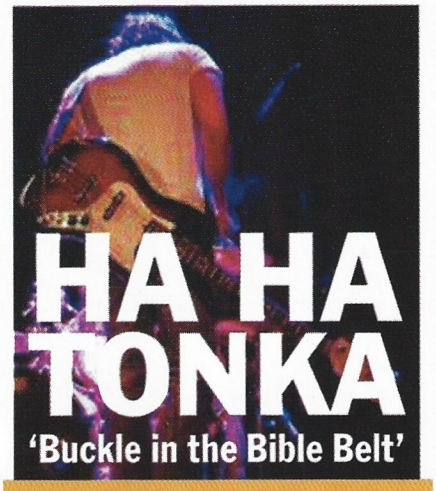

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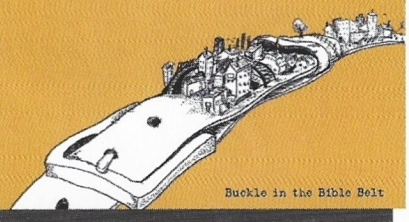
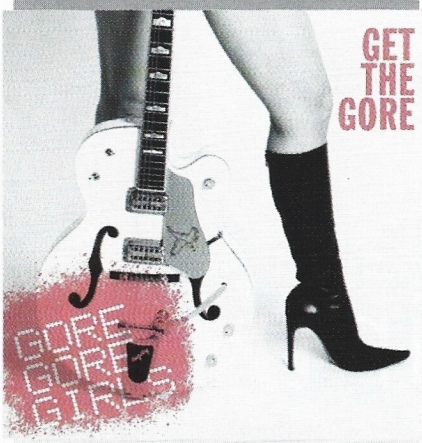


Blistering rock and sanctified four part harmonies. Bridges the North and the South, much in the way of a REM or Kings of Leon. **ON TOUR ALL FALL**

GORE GORE GIRLS
'Get The Gore'



The Gores innocent and insolent sound finds both the gum-snapping punk in the Ronettes and the sweet and dirty romance in the Stooges. It is brash, cute and killer. ON TOUR ALL FALL

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White Stripes: Back to the slammer for vulgar language.

PHIL MUCCI

CALLING A SPADE A SPADE

I JUST WANTED TO SAY after reading your mag for a few years that it is the best! A friend recommended *Harp* and I read it on-line. I return to it daily because of two simple reasons; informative and excellent writing. But more, you have the guts and balls to call a spade a spade. I refer to your recent piece on New Order ["New Order Goes Splitsville... Finally!"—HARP online, May 4]. I laughed that you often use witty bang on sarcasm that is both critical and truthful. I also cherish that *Harp* has not fallen into the trap of merely being a promotion rag like several others. Thanks for writing well and making me laugh and stay informed!! Cheers.

TIMOTHY HAWKINS
VIA EMAIL

FLUFF JOB

Your cover choice for the June issue really pissed me off. Who gives a rats ass about Minnie F$≠&*ing Driver? Be a music magazine, put the quality musicians you write about month after month on the cover. What value did you figure a shot and feature like that held in the HARP readers' eye? If I want fluff I'll buy *US*.

NEIL MORSE
VIA INTERNET

EFFIN' TIRED OF THE "F" WORD

THE WHITE STRIPES ARTICLE in the August issue disappointed me. I love HARP for its multitudes of reviews and music-related articles, but this piece struck me as sophomoric! I started counting the number of times the "F" word appeared and got bored. Just because I like music and I like Jack White doesn't mean you have to keep my attention with incessant What-Da-Fucks, Fuck Yous, and Shut-the-fuck-ups. And I really don't think it does *Harp* (or any of us) any good at all to refer to fellow harsh music critics as "fuck-faced."

The "F" word has its place in literature, in dialogue, even perhaps in magazines like *Harp*, but in this piece it just reeked alongside the infantile rantings about drummers and bands the author thinks we shouldn't like. How unprofessional and uninteresting. The attitude behind this article was embarrassing; it was as if Jack White was being interviewed by Jack Black—not the funny actor, but one of his moronic characters.

JAMES GALE
BATH, MAINE

Our apologies for Mike Edison's abuse of the F-word—sometimes he gets carried away. Really, we're sorry. No, really. Seriously. Fuck.

MIKE EDISON DESERVES special thanks for doing something different and fresh with the White Stripes. So refreshing to read a new take on the future R'N'R Hall of Famers.

JONATHAN BERRY
VIA EMAIL

MEAT LOVER

Loved the Meat Puppets article! ("On Your Feet," July *Harp*.) Keep up the good work!

CHRIS PATERNOSTER
VIA INTERNET

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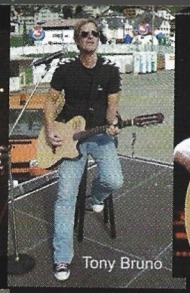
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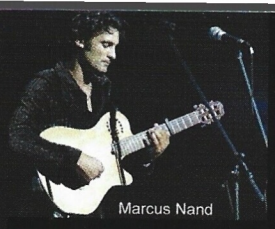
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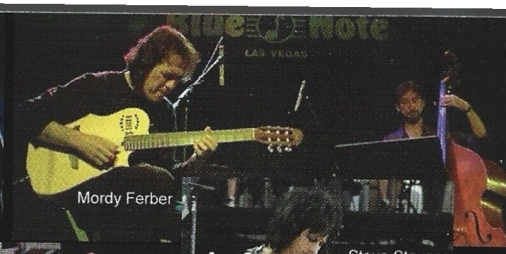
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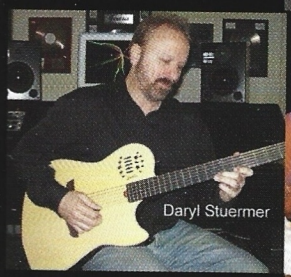
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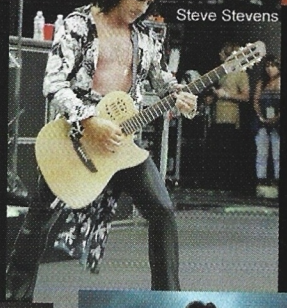
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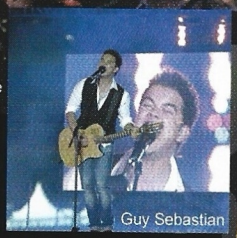
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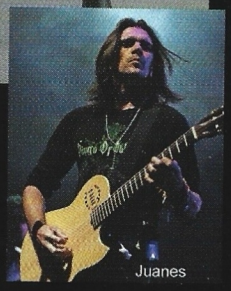
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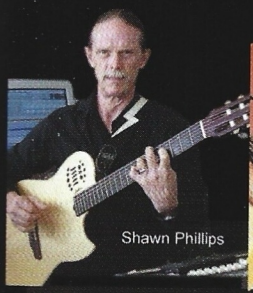
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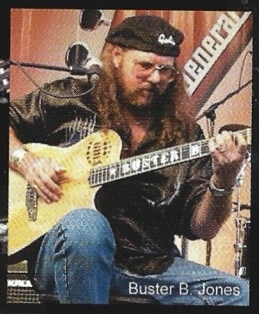
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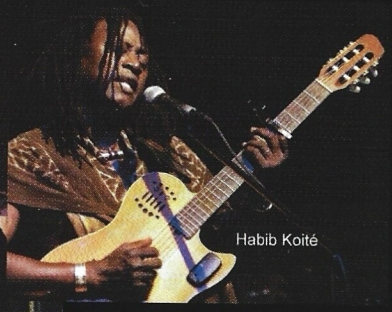
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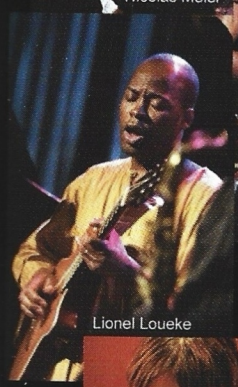
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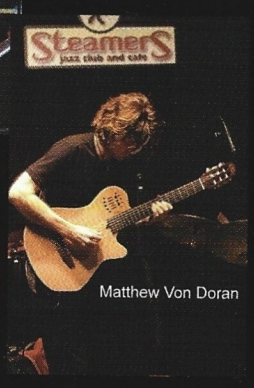
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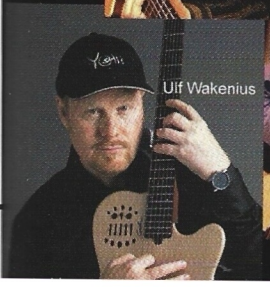
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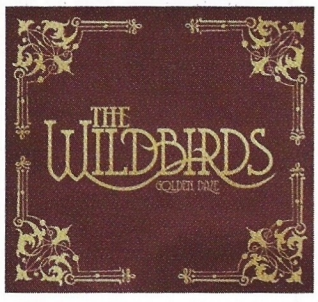

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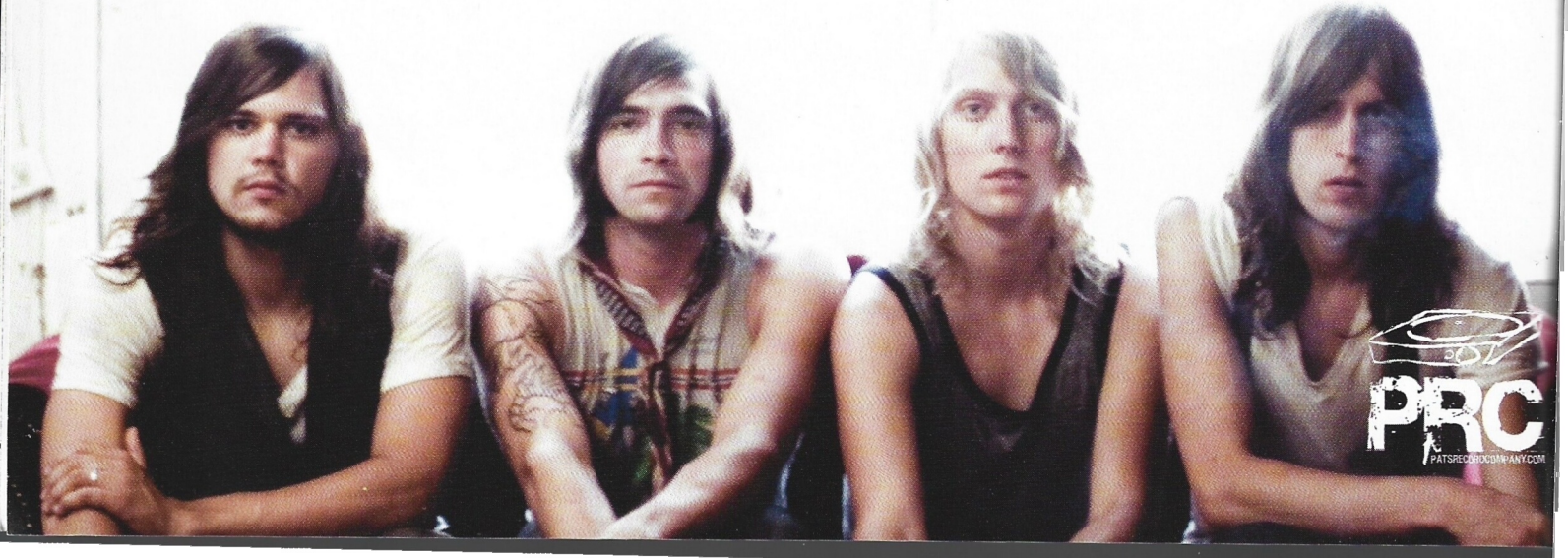

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Reverb

REMODEL/ REMAKE

Leaving the runway behind, Carla Bruni shapes classic poetry into song.

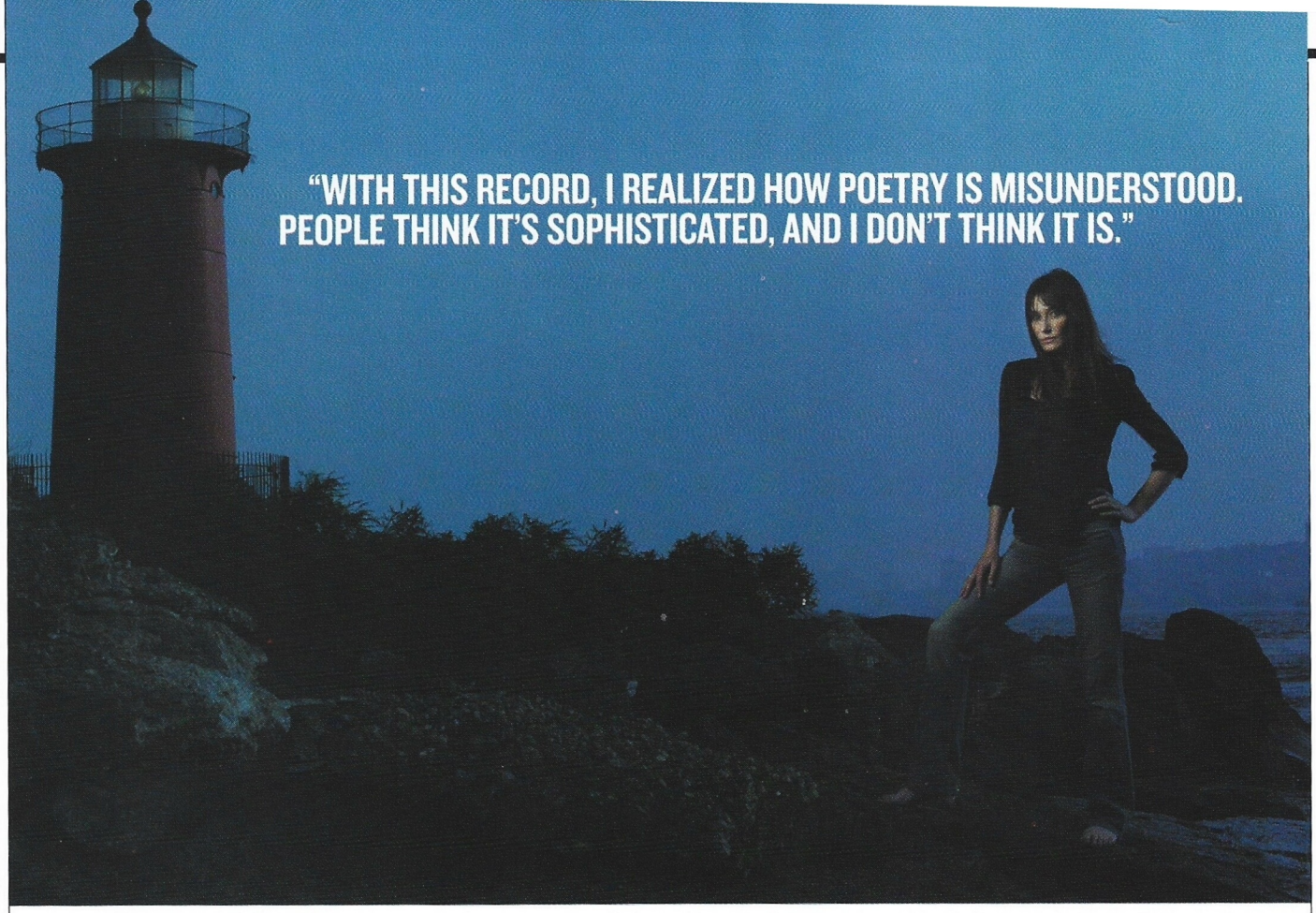
BY STEVE KLINGE

FROM THE OUTSIDE, CARLA BRUNI'S *No Promises* (Downtown Records) sounds like a sensuous singer-songwriter album, with songs about aging beauty and conflicted love sung in Bruni's breathy European voice. It's seductive on its own merits and sits comfortably next to Feist's *Let It Die* or recent albums from Keren Ann and Charlotte Gainsbourg.

But *No Promises* has a backstory: the words to the eleven songs come from poets such as William Butler Yeats, Emily Dickinson and W.H. Auden. Bruni repeats lines or stanzas to create choruses and structures so that they become true songs, not poems set to music. "Poems are so perfect most of the time, so mysterious, and they have their own music," says Bruni. "So you cannot keep them sacred. You have to forget that they're poems; otherwise, they don't become songs, they become singing poems."

Paradoxically, respect for the pure poetry of the poem allowed her the freedom to shape the poems into songs, and she does so with such skill that the words of Dickinson and Dorothy Parker sound modern and personal.

CHRISTOPHER MCLALLEN



CHRISTOPHER MCLALLEN

Bruni has her own backstory. Born into an exceedingly wealthy Italian family, she moved to Paris at a young age. From age 19 to 30 she modeled for Guess, Chanel and elsewhere—we're talking supermodel, with 250-odd magazine covers—and she was romantically linked to Mick Jagger and Eric Clapton. She released her first album of French songs, *Quelqu'un m'a dit*, in 2002. Now 39, raising her six-year-old son with his father, a French philosophy teacher, Bruni sees herself as "a beginning songwriter."

"I really started putting my lyrics and my music together when I stopped the modeling," she says. "I always wrote little poems and I always wrote little melodies. [Songwriting] was always my greatest passion and I always brought my guitar with me everywhere—but still I had no time. No space. When you write songs, you need silence and a little loneliness. Modeling doesn't bring you to that."

Bruni hadn't planned to make an album of English-language poems. She had often turned Italian and French poems into songs—Charles Baudelaire is a favorite—but after Marianne Faithfull gave her a collection of Shakespeare's love sonnets and told her to read one each night before bed, she started delving into poems in English. Eventually, she began turning some of them into songs, and later still she decided they could become an album.

"With this record, I realized how poetry is misunderstood. People think it's sophisticated, and I don't think it is. I'm not very sophisticated myself, I'm not very cultivated. I love poetry because it is like pure emotion for me. Of course the words are not so simple because sometimes they're ancient. But apart from that, it's not so strange."

To help her with some of the archaic phrases—Bruni mentions "nought gold" from Walter de la Mare's "Autumn"—she drafted Faithfull, and they worked together in Paris for two months. "English is such a beautiful language. Of course, it's a foreign language to me, and I wanted to keep the mystery but I wanted to know just a little bit more," says Bruni. "[Faithfull] knows so much about poetry and literature in general, it's amazing. So we dropped into the biography of all the poets and their lives and who their muses were; it was really fantastic."

No Promises came out last year in Europe to much acclaim, and Bruni's already at work on album number three, a collection of her own songs in French and Italian. "Maybe there will be one in English, but you know, my English writing is far from Yeats'," she laughs. "The French and Italian languages can match [on the album], because they're cousin countries. Jean Cocteau used to say, the French people are Italian people in a bad mood. He's kind of right." **H**

World Party

Three of Carla Bruni's favorite albums, one French, one American, one Italian.

1. SERGE GAINSBOURG *Histoire de Melody Nelson* (1971)
I really like that record, all of it: the lyrics, the music, the sound and the ambience, the atmosphere on the record. It's not a singles record; it's more like a whole record that you have to play it all. That's the way I made my first record, the one I made in French called *Quelqu'un m'a dit*. Maybe it's boring to some people, but I really like when something's like a whole record and not made of different brands.

2. BOB DYLAN *Nashville Skyline* (1969)
I like the same thing about *Nashville Skyline*. I think the sound of it, it's like you open the window and the sun gets in. It's really like a very sunny, Sunday morning. I find it magical. I know he's been making only wonderful records recently, but this one, I can't get it out of my heart. "Lay Lady Lay," it's just, wow! Sexy, beautiful, simple—like crystal. Pure.

3. ORNELLA VANONI *La Voglia La Pazzia L'incosienza L'allegria* (1976)
And a third record, I was thinking of [pauses] this Italian woman who's called Ornella Vanoni, do you know her? Ah, so beautiful. She made a record out of Brazilian music but she translated and sang it in Italian, and it's just one of the most beautiful records I've ever heard.

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Joe Henry

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ANTI-

Settled and Otherwise

Handsome Furs' Dan Boeckner searches for home on *Plague Park*.

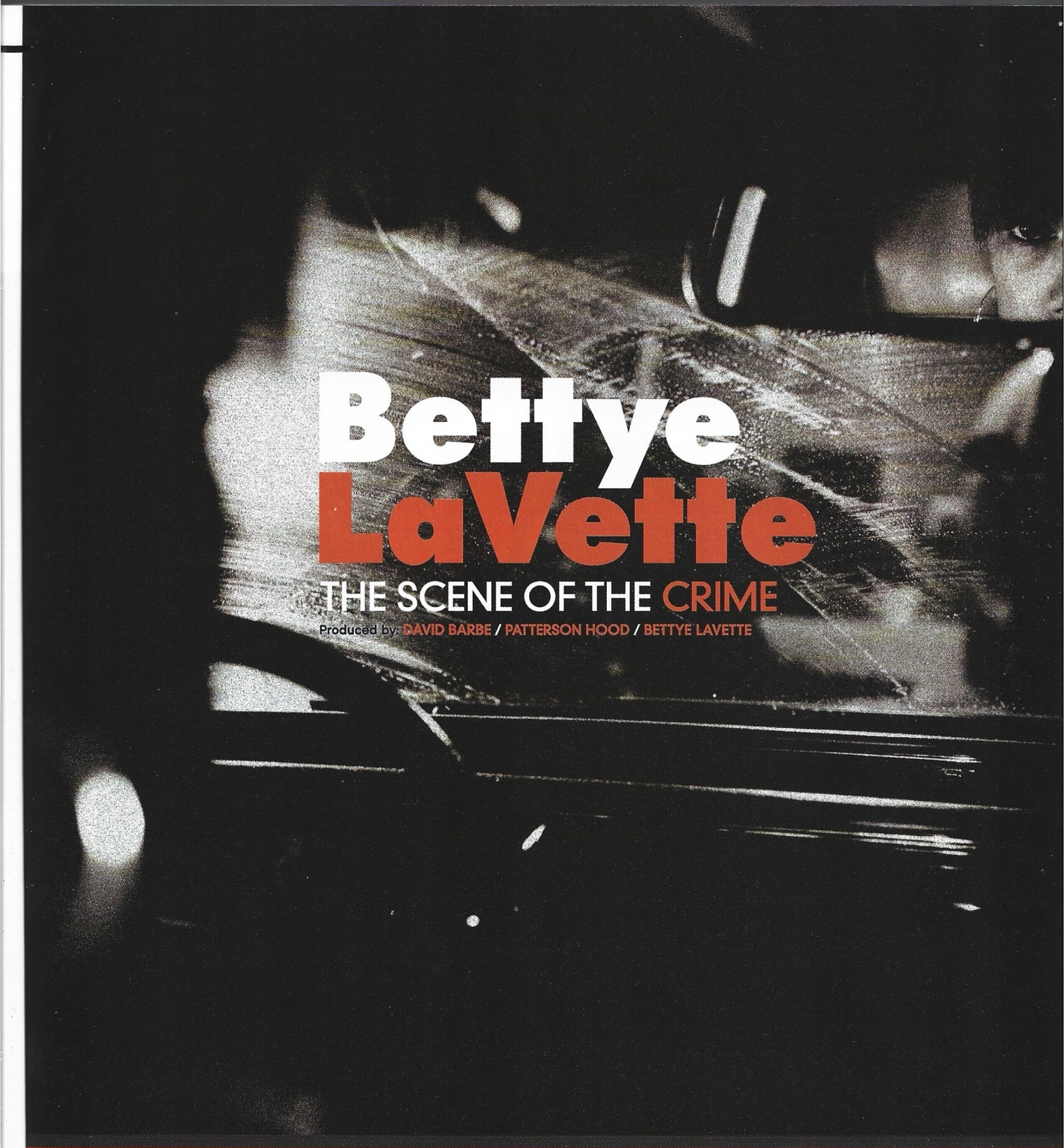
Since forming in 2003, the members of Wolf Parade have made just one full-length album yet somehow managed to take part in five side projects. Singer-keyboardist Spencer Krug leads Sunset Rubdown and plays with Frog Eyes and Swan Lake, and guitarist Dante DeCaro formed Johnny and the Moon. Now, singer-guitarist Dan Boeckner is stepping out from the band with a project of his own. Handsome Furs is a collaboration with his fiancée, Alexei Perry.

"The side projects are a way of taking the pressure off and a way of not stagnating," says Boeckner. "Working with several groups of people helps your songwriting."

With Wolf Parade, Boeckner is known for writing and singing the band's most anthemic songs, including "Shine a Light" and "This Heart's on Fire." His goal on Handsome Furs' debut, *Plague Park* (Sub Pop), was to simplify his sound, using only guitar, keyboards and a drum machine. "I wanted this record to have a darker aesthetic than the Wolf Parade songs—a little less hopeful," he explains. "I wrote these songs in the winter after a really long, arduous tour with Wolf Parade. I was feeling kind of lost and disoriented after a lot of time on the road."

As a result, much of *Plague Park* focuses on the search for home, something Boeckner has struggled with since moving from rural Vancouver Island to the city of Vancouver and, later, Montreal. "I hated my hometown," he says. "Me and my friend were the only two punk kids there and we used to do a lot of acid on the weekends, [then] wander around and try to avoid getting beat up by rednecks in pickup trucks. But later I went back to visit my dad and I realized it's a beautiful place.

"Ultimately, I'm not sure if I want to be in a city or a small town," he continues. "In some ways, I don't see myself fitting in anywhere. Or maybe I just like to complain." HAL BIENSTOCK



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BETTYE LAVETTE & DRIVE BY TRUCKERS collaborate on this one-of-a-kind record filled with mini-dramas about life, love and survival.

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Recorded @: Fame Studios, Muscle Shoals, Alabama

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SONGWRITER WE'D LIKE TO GET TO KNOW BETTER:

SARAH BORGES

IF BOSTON-BASED roots-rocker Sarah Borges ever gets sick of touring, she has a bright future in marketing. Told how *Harp* heard her album while a hostage in a huge traffic jam, she says "it's too bad we couldn't force that situation upon everyone we want to hear the record," like make their car stop or stall so they *have* to listen. We could call it *Engine Disabler!*" That's exactly the kind of captive-audience marketing idea the big media suits like to hear—but lucky for Borges, she and her band the Broken Singles don't have to resort to such tactics. Rooted in roadhouse roots rock but mindful of everything from KISS to the Replacements to Reigning Sound, and wet with Borges' gorgeous Kelly Willis/Mary Weiss vocals, *Diamonds in the Dark* (Sugar Hill) is required listening you'll demand to hear.

DIGGIN' UNCLE Q

"The Day We Met" sounds like it has NRBQ's Big Al Anderson written all over it. Borges says her bandmates hipped her to the goofy High Geniuses of American rock 'n' roll. "Our guitar player Mike, he's from New York and he's seen NRBQ [innumerable] times...[and] he started bringing all the NRBQ records into the van. There ain't nothin' like driving down the American highway listenin' to NRBQ's *Live at Yankee Stadium*."

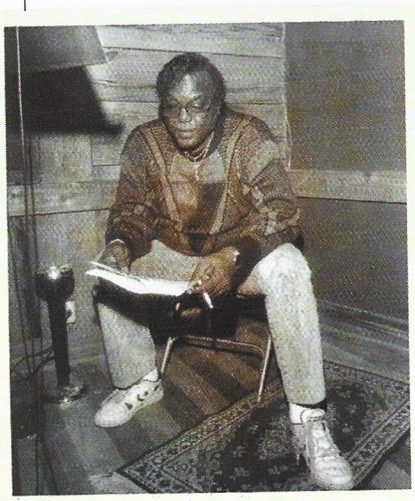
SHE WORKS HARD FOR THE...TANGIBLE END.

"Part of the reason that people make art is there's something that they're trying to work out or work through. I don't know if you really know what that is until the end of it, and maybe there isn't an end—but at least a song is a tangible, 3 ½-minute end. You're a little bit further along at workin' out where you're at in your life in the 3 ½ minutes than you were before you wrote it."

UNCOMMONLY GOOD!

Harp's own David Sprague says there's an "impossibly infectious hook secreted in every song." Sounds like a Keebler cookie, eh? They are, of course, uncommonly good. "[*laughing*] Yeah, I know. Of course it makes you laugh hysterically when you read stuff that's been written about you. Not that you feel like it's untrue, but other people's assessments of what you're saying is always a little bit suspect. But that's a flattering thing to have said, but it does conjure up Keebler elves or puppies." DUC PHAM

EDWARD SMITH FOR HARP



The Sound of Heartbreak

Soul man Arthur Alexander gets his posthumous due.

THROUGHOUT MOST OF HIS CAREER, Arthur Alexander served as a parenthetical footnote. The Beatles covered the Florence, Alabama-born soul singer's 1962 composition "Anna" (and "Soldier of Love," never formally released) and the Rolling Stones recorded his "You Better Move On." Elvis Presley heard Alexander's 1971 take on Dennis Linde's "Burning Love" and nicked it for himself, and in 1988 Bob Dylan borrowed Alexander's "Sally Sue Brown" for his *Down in the Groove* album.

Despite those credentials, Alexander's own recording career never really took off, and by the mid-'70s he'd given up on the music business, returning to Alabama to drive a bus. Fifteen years would pass until roots-rocker Ben Vaughn coerced Alexander back into the studio to cut *Lonely Just Like Me*, a gem of a Southern soul album released in 1993 by the Nonesuch label.

Alexander died just as his comeback was kicking in, but that Vaughn-produced career capper has now been reissued by Hacktone, its title appended with *The Final Chapter*. Some 14 bonus tracks enhance it, including live material from NPR's *Fresh Air* (plus "Anna," taped at New York's Bottom Line), hotel-room demos and interview snips. Writes Vaughn in his liner notes, "If heartbreak had a sound, it was this voice." JEFF TAMARKIN

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Master Fating

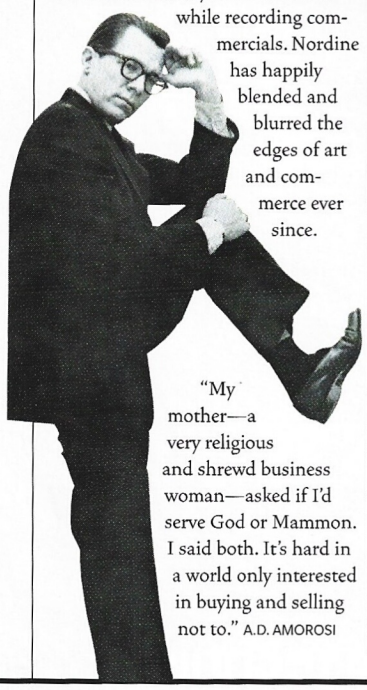
Ken Nordine is still our premier world alchemist.

JUST RETURNED TO CHICAGO from "the high" of Manhattan's Highline Fest ("Did you notice the effects of the Vicodin?" he jokes) Ken Nordine is back to business: the art of talking; the talking of art.

Nordine's deeply resonating silken burr has produced more than a few advertising gems in his 87 years. The highly imagistic prose of Word Jazz he recorded throughout the '50s and '60s, compiled onto the re-released box *You're Getting Better: The Word Jazz Dot Masters*, continues into the 2000s with his *The Eye Is Never Filled* DVD.

Nordine is his own boss. "No adult supervision, no saving your ass," he says sinisterly, about recording from his Chicago home studio on a mix of digital and analog equipment. "Dolby Sound Reduction, Ampex 24 tracks—all so beautifully out-of-date—and ProTools," says Nordine.

That's not far from what he did for Dot Records after label boss Randy Woods asked Nordine to read "talking lyrics" for Billy Vaughn's *The Shifting Whispering Sands*. "Got anything else?" Woods asked. Nordine did: He'd been seriously fooling around with paranoid Beat visions put to music—Word Jazz—in the basement of his Hyland Park home while recording commercials. Nordine has happily blended and blurred the edges of art and commerce ever since.



"My mother—a very religious and shrewd business woman—asked if I'd serve God or Mammon. I said both. It's hard in a world only interested in buying and selling not to." A.D. AMOROSI

LOOSE BUT TIGHT

Nina Nastasia and Jim White strip down.

BOBBY NEEL ADAMS

GIVEN SOME OF THE early press for *You Follow Me*, the new guitar-and-drums collaboration from Nina Nastasia and Jim White, you'd think it was indie rock's answer to an improvisational free jazz ear-assault. But even a cursory listen to these 10 songs tells a very different story, one of concise songwriting and meticulous arrangements hashed out over nearly a month of studio sessions.

"I've read some reviews that seem to think it's random or something," laughs White, the much sought-after drummer for instrumental pioneers Dirty Three. "But actually every note is in the right place on that record."

Nastasia's three previous releases also include White's distinctive stick-work, and he's a fixture in her touring band. They'd also played a couple of stripped-down duo gigs, and during the recording sessions for last year's *On Leaving*, White suggested they make a record contrasting Nastasia's haunting narratives with the drums' more melodic possibilities. "This was an opportunity for him to take on the role of all the other instruments that usually play in the band," says Nastasia, who immediately took to the concept. "If anybody could do that, it's Jim."

Rather than turn to her stockpile of previously written songs, Nastasia penned a dozen new ones for the project. Together with White and her long-time producer Kennan Gudjonsson, the three cherry-picked which drum approaches from various run-throughs worked best for each song. "We sorted through them and each of us found things we liked," says White. "Then I'd sort through theirs and find what I liked and reassemble them."

Throughout, White seems to hit on just the right delicate shading, volcanic rolls or shape-shifting polyrhythms for each of Nastasia's acoustic patterns and vocal flights. If the songs have the same visceral immediacy you might find in a looser environment—well, isn't that the goal when musicians talk about capturing that live feeling in the studio?

"Some people may not get it," Nastasia concedes, "but it was exactly what we wanted to do, and I love it." JOHN SCHACHT

JIMI IN A MINI

Workin' up a purple haze with Hendrix Electric Vodka.

Maybe you thought the first products to bear the Hendrix name would be rolling papers, scarves, lava lamps, maybe kielbasa. Uh-uh—it's vodka.

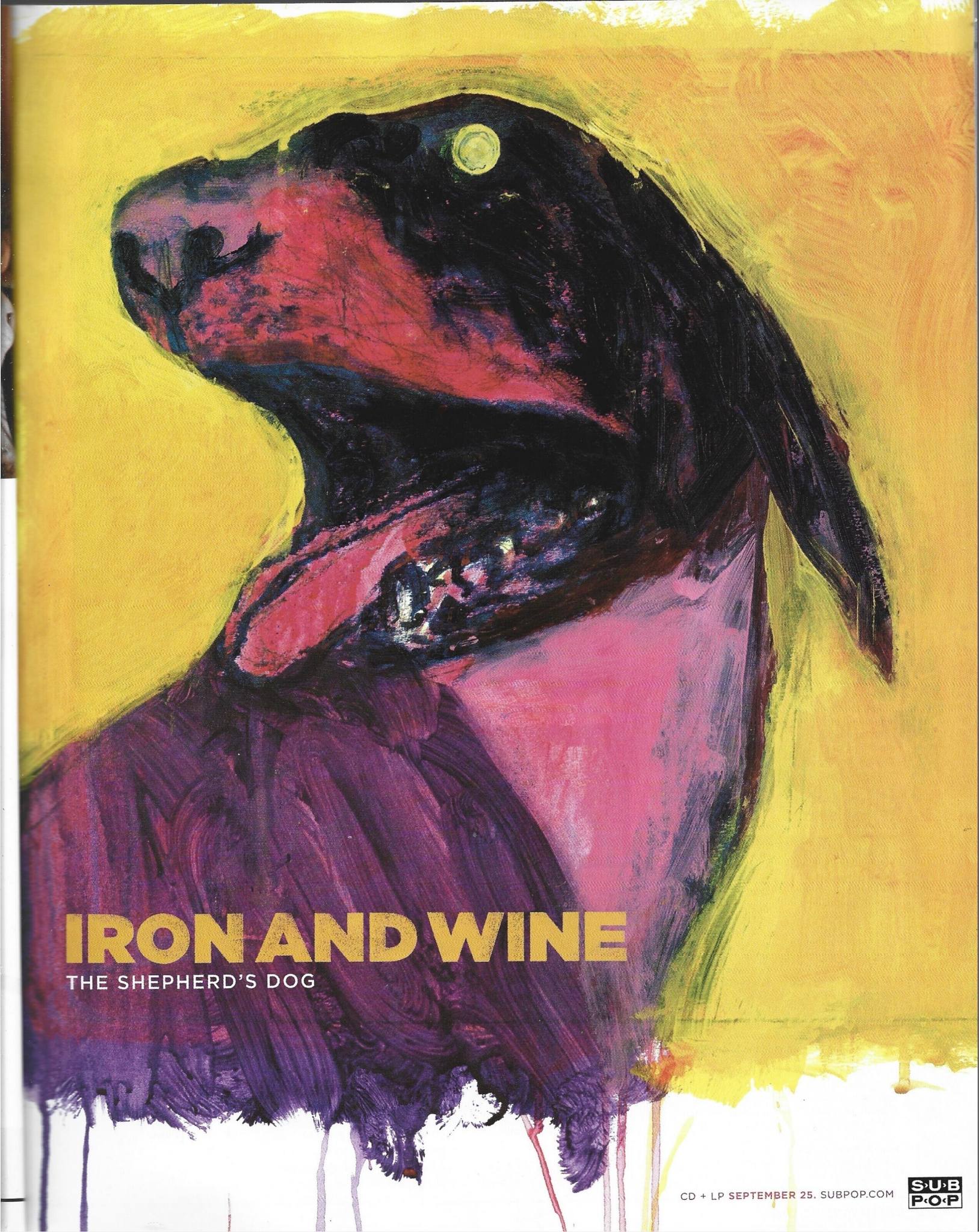
Hendrix Electric Vodka (www.houseofhendrix.com) was unveiled to the public a year ago, and has since been seen in the hands of such beautiful people as Quentin Tarantino, various screamin' hotties, and now *Harp*. So let's see what this super-premium, 100% grain, carbon and crystal filtered juice—fully endorsed by the Hendrix clan—can do for us.

FRONT PORCH, 9:09 P.M.
The cap ascends the threads like a ripe high school virgin descends stairs on prom night: with a supernatural, floaty grace. Although this is vodka, there is a faint aroma. Jimi musk?

FRONT PORCH, 9:15 P.M.
Hoist bottle, tip to lips, wonder if there's a secret ingredient that can cure my sloppy guitar technique. Or get Cynthia Plaster Caster to create a monument to my manhood. My thoughts are interrupted as the nectar of the guitar god runs smoothly down the back of my throat.

CARPORT, 9:17 P.M.
I'll bet they saved Jimi's 'fro and used it to filter this fine spirit. So clear, so refreshing—you guys see those tracers? Look—when I wave my hand it looks like lots of other hands. I love you, guys. Let's play croquet!

COMMON AREA, 9:19 P.M.
I hold my croquet mallet aloft like Excalibur. I kneel and pour HEV up and down the mallet. After a brief hiccup (childproof lighter), a flame is birthed. I may not be a guitar hero, but I rule at croquet. And lovin'. RANDY HARWARD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[QUOTABLES]

"I was here about one minute and somebody offered me some weed. I told him, 'Brother, I don't smoke.'"

BILLY CORGAN, ON HIS JUNE 22 ARRIVAL IN ASHEVILLE, N.C., FOR THE SMASHING PUMPKINS' NINE-DATE CONCERT RESIDENCY.

TED LISCINSKI

You May Kiss The Brides' Ass

Empowered and deflowered, Burning Brides take it to the altar on *Hang Love*.

SEVEN YEARS AFTER signing a million-dollar record deal out of nowhere, and three years after drugs and tumultuous band dynamics nearly destroyed them, Burning Brides have returned with their third effort, *Hang Love*. The album—released independently through their manager's ModArt label—is a ferociously heavy musical rebirth that singer/songwriter Dimitri Coats says is the band's strongest yet.

What makes *Hang Love* the signature Burning Brides record?
We've always been interested in combining the dark side with beauty, and a lot of the struggles we were going through manifested themselves through these new songs.

How did the *Hang Love* recording sessions differ from those in the past?
When we were recording *Leave No Ashes* (V2) I could have asked the label to hire someone come in the bathroom and wipe my ass for me. It was retarded—you don't need to spend that much money making a record. *Hang Love* was recorded in the same vein as our first record. I produced it and we just played through our gear, no bullshit.

What's the most difficult part of being Burning Brides?
Because I write the songs and because I have a certain idea of how things should go, I have to remember not to be an asshole. Even though the stakes are high and it's life or death, it's still only rock 'n' roll and it should be fun at the end of the day.

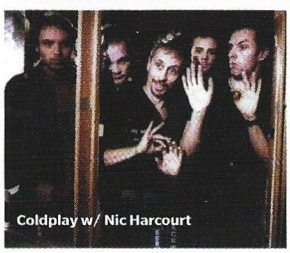
SCOTT DUDELSON

ENCYCLOPEDIA ECLECTICA

Morning Becomes Eclectic celebrates three decades of essential, eclectic music.

Tom Schnabel w/ Nina Simone

COURTESY TOM SCHNABEL



Coldplay w/ Nic Harcourt

UNDERNEATH THE cafeteria on the campus of Santa Monica City College lies KCRW, the National Public Radio's flagship station for Southern California. For the last 30 years the station has played groundbreaking music and introduced new, influential artists such as Beck and Coldplay on the highly acclaimed program *Morning Becomes Eclectic*.

Over Labor Day weekend, former musical directors Tom Schnabel and Chris Douridas, along with current M.D. and host Nic Harcourt, will produce a troika of three-hour specials covering the best moments during their tenures on one of country's most influential radio shows. The three specials will feature rare live performances and interview clips.

Original host Schnabel, whose first guest was Ravi Shankar, says his three-hour block will include Nina Simone (whose visits varied depending if she was on or off medication), Jonathan Richman, pianist Victor Borge and Little Richard.

Douridas, who has been with KCRW for 17 years, will feature former guests Brian Eno, Joni Mitchell, Burt Bacharach, Tom Waits and Beck, whom Douridas helped break. "Beck was a very exciting time," he recalls. "I remember hearing that first 12-inch of 'Loser' and thinking, 'After I throw this on the air all hell is going to break loose.' And sure enough, I opened the show with it and the phone calls started coming in. Beck was one of the true arrivals that ushered a new way of doing things."

Current *MBE* host Harcourt reflects looks back at his nine years on the show with music from Coldplay, Damien Rice, Dido, Ravi Shankar and Willie Nelson. Harcourt may kick off his three-hour show with the Jam's "Start"—the first song he played at KCRW. "We're going to get the history of *Morning Becomes Eclectic*," he says. "If you look at the work that Chris and Tom did before me, everybody has contributed their moment."

Someone you won't hear is Harcourt's first-ever MBE guest, God Lives Underwater. "They were complete dicks! But I'm still here and they don't exist anymore [laughs]."

Listen to "Morning Becomes Eclectic" online at www.kcrw.com.

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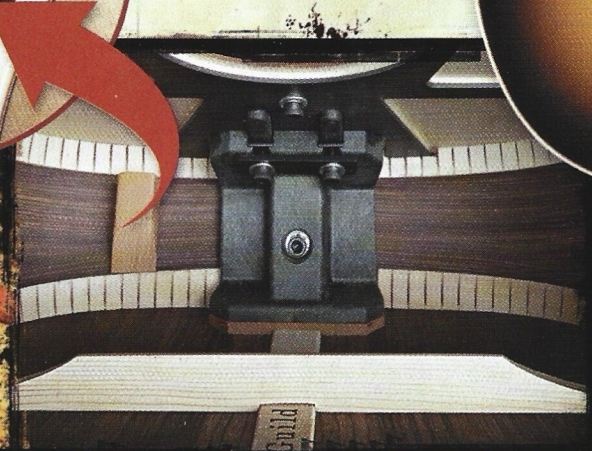

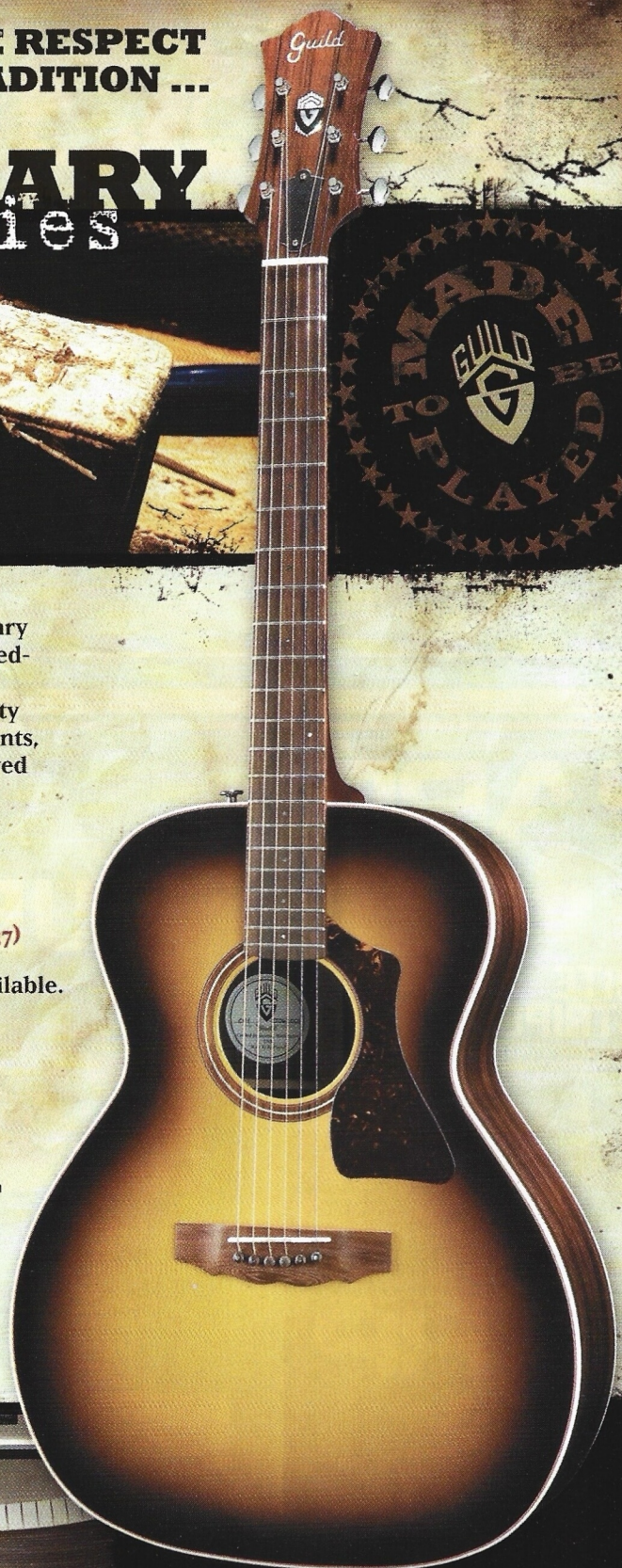

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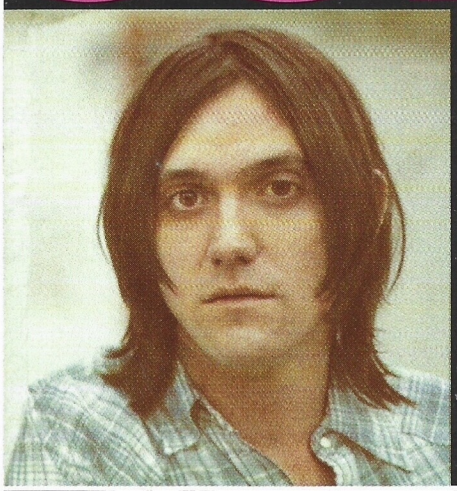

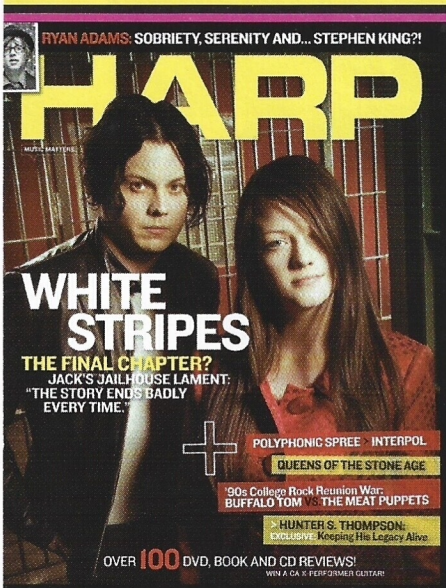
RYAN ADAMS: SOBRIETY, SERENITY AND... STEPHEN KING?!
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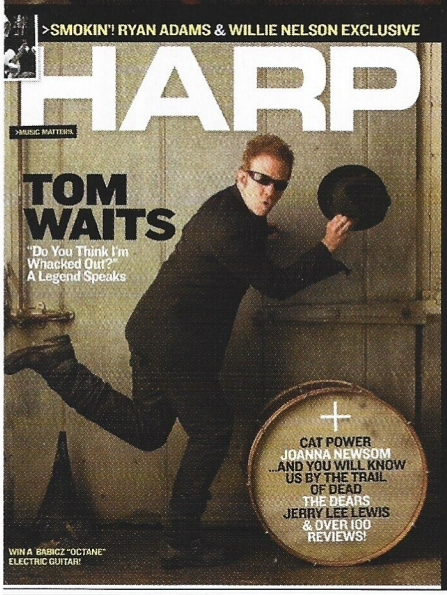
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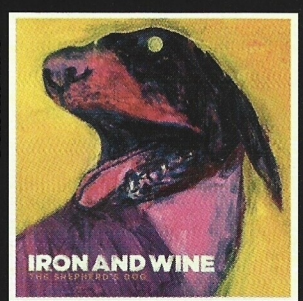

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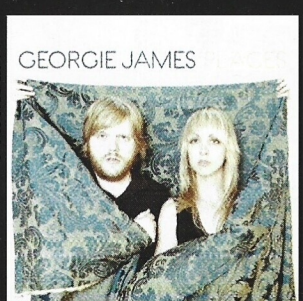

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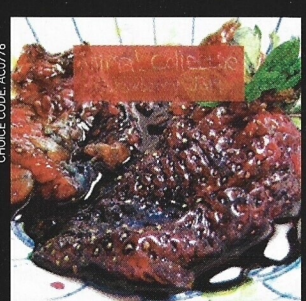

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STEVE GULLICK

LUV MACHINE

The Magic Numbers keep on lovin'.

"WE'RE NOT JUST a happy-go-lucky band into West Coast '60s pop," says Magic Numbers singer Romeo Stodart. "That's a tiny part of what we do. I'm just interested in songwriting... I love the intimacy of someone telling you something that was part of their life and you adapting it to your own."

On their second album, *Those the Brokes* (Capitol), the band has expanded its upbeat pop sound, adding strings, heavier guitar tones and elements of R&B. *Those the Brokes* also finds the women in the band coming out of their shells: multi-instrumentalist Angela Gannon takes lead vocals on the country-soul song "Undecided," while Stodart's bassist sister Michele grabs the mic for the orchestral ballad "Take Me or Leave Me."

Although the band's sound and personality may have changed slightly, its preoccupation remains the same: *Those the Brokes* is all about the challenges of love. Of course, love is a well-trodden topic in rock 'n' roll, but Stodart says it's ground he'll likely continue to mine. "It is challenging sometimes, and I always hope I'm not repeating myself," he says. Who better than a love song-writing guy named Romeo to explain what makes a great tune about L-U-V? He talked about five of his favorites:

"Anyhow, I Love You" GUY CLARK

"We're huge country music fans and Guy Clark is an absolute legend. This song has one of the best opening lyrics ever: 'I wish I had a dime for all the bad times, but the bad times always seem to keep the change.' You just can't top it, genius."

"I Fall To Pieces" PATSY CLINE

"This is one of the first songs I remember hearing when I was around six years old growing up in Trinidad. My family would sit around the record player crying to this song. I realized the power within it a little later on, but that memory will stay with me forever."

"God Only Knows" THE BEACH BOYS

"Just a classic in every way. A song that continues to inspire us."

"Hot Burrito No. 1" THE FLYING BURRITO BROTHERS

"It's all in the vocal delivery in this song for me. You can hear real sadness and vulnerability within Gram Parsons' voice when he sings 'I'm your toy, I'm your old boy and I don't want no one but you to love me.' It's on every mix tape I've ever made for anyone, usually near the end."

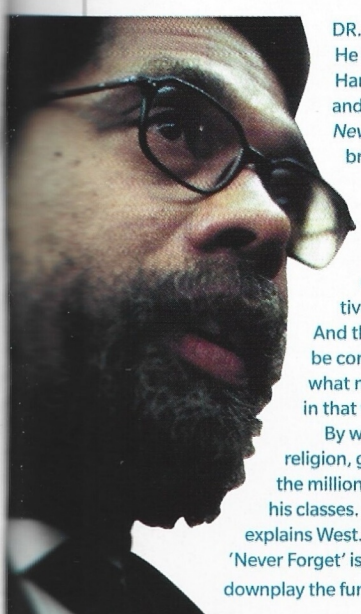
"Silly Love" DANIEL JOHNSTON

"As with most of Daniel Johnston's songs, you hear the truth, his honest take on that feeling called Love. Just beautiful."

HAL BIENSTOCK

PAIDEIA ALL NITE!

No stuffy professor, Dr. Cornel West fuses fun with struggle.



DR. CORNEL WEST IS ONE OF America's most important and gifted intellectuals. He is currently professor of religion at Princeton University, previously taught at Harvard, and has authored 17 books including 1993's landmark *Race Matters* and 2004's *Democracy Matters*. On August 14 West will release his second album, *Never Forget: A Journey of Revelations* (Hidden Beach), featuring the best and brightest in black music including Prince, André 3000, Talib Kweli, KRS-One, Jill Scott and the late Gerald LeVert among others.

So how does West connect his academic life to his musical pursuits? "It's all about paideia, a danceable education," he says. "Paideia has to do with three things: the formation of attention, so you move from focusing on superficial things to substantial things. Secondly it has to do with the cultivation of the self that comes to terms with reality, history, as well as mortality. And third it has to do with the maturation of a soul, which means learning how to be compassionate, loving, empathetic. That's what manifests in my writing, that's what manifests in my speeches, that's what manifests in my music; it's continuous in that way."

By weaving bangin' beats and top-notch musical talent into discussions on race, religion, government, 9/11 and the "N" word, West has created an album to reach the millions of young folk who might not read his books and will never sit in on one of his classes. "The goal of the album is to promote an awakening among young people," explains West. "That awakening has to do with both a sense of history—that's what the 'Never Forget' is about, but also to fuse fun with the struggle for freedom. 'Cause I don't wanna downplay the fun." AARON KAYCE

TURBO GRANNY

Sweet old 73-year-old Mormon grandmother meets thirty-something Norwegian hellraiser.

MEET SWEET SEVENTY-SOMETHING Grandma Harward, avid crochet-er, lover of "Scotty dogs," proud spoiler of dozens of grandchildren and great-grandchildren. When asked to interview Hank Von Helvete (a.k.a. Hank from Hell) of notorious Norwegian deathpunks Turbonegro, she didn't hesitate to accept—even after viewing the song titles on the band's classic *Ass Cobra* (Burning Heart/Epitaph), including such nuggets as "I Got Erection" and "Raggare Is a Bunch of Motherfuckers." Aw, ain't she a peach?

Grandma Harward: Hi, Hank. How are you? I hope you're doing good. Are you from Norway?

Hank Von Helvete: I'm fine. Yeah, I'm from Norway.

Oh, good. I just wanted to tell you my ancestors are from Norway. So anyway, what can you tell me about Turbonegro?

HVH: Well, we're six nice boys from the suburbs of Oslo, Norway, and we like to dress up and play rock 'n' roll in public. I usually say a Turbonegro concert is like a Catholic midnight mass on New Year's Eve.

***Oh* my gosh. Uh...why is the music quite vulgar? Why do you use the "F" word so much?**

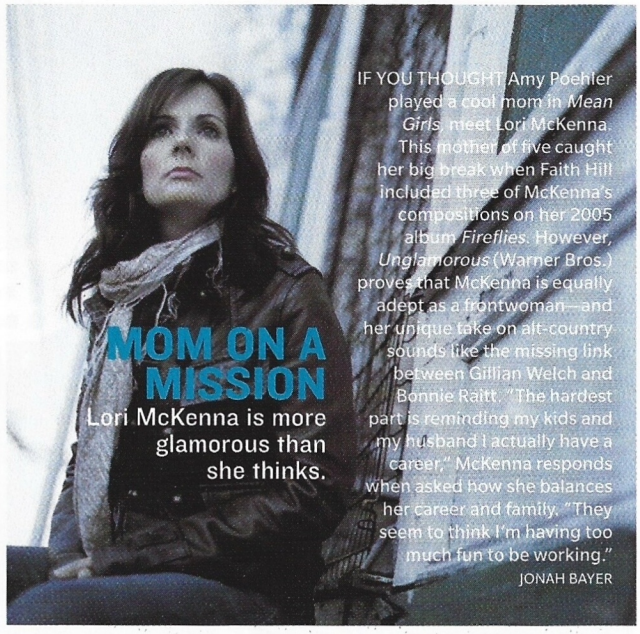
HVH: Well, for us to play punk rock and to play loud, it's kind of like a catharsis. If we didn't have the band, we would probably be very dysfunctional citizens in society. It's a way to channel our aggressions and our rage and our frustration and our anxiety. We get it out of our system and we can open a beer after a show and actually be nice boys.

Well, when I listen to Turbonegro, I feel like I've got a dirty shirt. But the generation that you play for, you have your own lyrics, your own reason for them. So I respect that.

HVH: Oscar Wilde said that in all matters that matter, style and [sincerity] is important. And in all matters that don't matter, also style and [sincerity] is important. How you express yourself will vary from generation to generation. And even though Frank Sinatra, for instance, didn't use many swear words, he told some very dark stories in his songs. *And* between his songs.

My own grandma also had reacted to our lyrics, our sound and also our appearances. She once was reading a newspaper and saw a huge picture of me with a naked upper body and [I was] sweaty, and also a bit bloody and I had makeup all over. And she was almost in tears when she said, "When you're so lucky that you get your face in the newspaper, why don't you show the people what nice boy you are? Instead of looking like the devil?" [*both laugh*]

Turbonegro's eighth album Retox *(Cooking Vinyl/Scandinavian Leather) is out now. Rest assured the band's self-proclaimed "nihilistic homo punk metal biker movie" will dirty your shirt butt good.*



MOM ON A MISSION

Lori McKenna is more glamorous than she thinks.

IF YOU THOUGHT Amy Poehler played a cool mom in *Mean Girls*, meet Lori McKenna. This mother of five caught her big break when Faith Hill included three of McKenna's compositions on her 2005 album *Fireflies*. However, *Unglamorous* (Warner Bros.) proves that McKenna is equally adept as a frontwoman—and her unique take on alt-country sounds like the missing link between Gillian Welch and Bonnie Raitt. "The hardest part is reminding my kids and my husband I actually have a career," McKenna responds when asked how she balances her career and family. "They seem to think I'm having too much fun to be working." JONAH BAYER

MICHAEL WILSON

Manu, That's Who

Globetrotting Manu Chao makes the world his country.

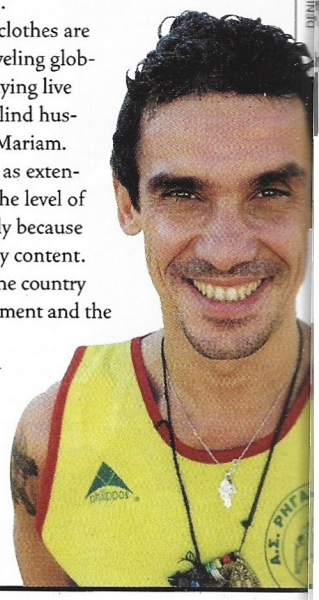
"THERE IS ONLY one thing I still don't understand," Manu Chao says the day after his triumphant Bonnaroo set and not long after an equally successful Coachella gig. "I've got two passports, French and Spanish. In both cases I cannot be proud of my president. But if we had a president like Bush, there would be 100,000 people every weekend in front of the White House protesting."

Chao has always been a politically driven artist, since leading the Clash-inspired punk group, Mano Negra. Chao's just-released third solo album, *La Radiolina* (Nacional/Because), his first since 2001, is his toughest yet, heavier on the guitars and no less accepting of the status quo. "Rainin' in Paradize," the first single, addresses what Chao sees as a breakdown of the Western system: "A lot of people think the problems are always in the third world and they're gonna be safe," he says, "but the shit has already hit the fan."

Chao has stakes in Barcelona—"My clothes are there"—but spends most of his time traveling globally, recording on his portable studio, playing live and producing others, including Mali's blind husband-and-wife sensations Amadou and Mariam. Chao had never toured the Unitet States as extensively as he did this spring though, and the level of complacency came as a surprise, especially because the Americans he met did not seem overly content.

"To me it's very good to get inside of the country and see the difference between the government and the people," Chao says.

If the recent tour is an indication, perhaps the United States is finally ready to tune in to Chao's multilingual, multigenre, message-thick melting pot. Just don't call him Latin Alternative—or anything else. "I don't trust labels," he says. "I'm Manu, that's all." JEFF TAMARKIN



DENIS DARZACQ

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MICHAEL WILSON

DENIS DARZACQ

FLESH & BLOOD

Cribs get video for "Men's Needs" banned in the U.K.

"Men's Needs," from the Cribs' third album, *Men's Needs, Women's Needs, Whatever* (Warner Bros.), is about the things that give us the strength to go out and be the Promise Keepers™ we were made by God to be. They are, in no particular order, creamy hooters, a machete, creased slacks and food. Or not: the point of the song—and the clip, in which a nekkid actress goes from willful plaything to woman scorned—runs contrary to the idea that men have certain intrinsic needs and that their fulfillment is an inalienable right. Ironically the clip was banned in the U.K. for the gore, which couldn't be more cartoonish. So while edited versions float about, *Harp* has obtained exclusive permission to publish the dirty parts. Why? Because we believe in, um, giving our readers the naked truth. RANDY HARWARD

DOG YEARS

The Mekons scratch their 30-year-old belly and call it *Natural*.

THERE'S A LONG tradition of British artists seeking inspiration in what William Blake called their "green and pleasant" countryside. So when it came time for their first record of new material in five years, Manchester's long-running outfit the Mekons hired a farmhouse in the Lake District for an idyllic, week-long brainstorming session. Fueled by home-cooked meals, late-night jam sessions and the local country pub, they wound up with the organic sounding *Natural* (Touch & Go), their 22nd release in 30 years. Main Mekon Jon Langford elaborates:

Natural Light

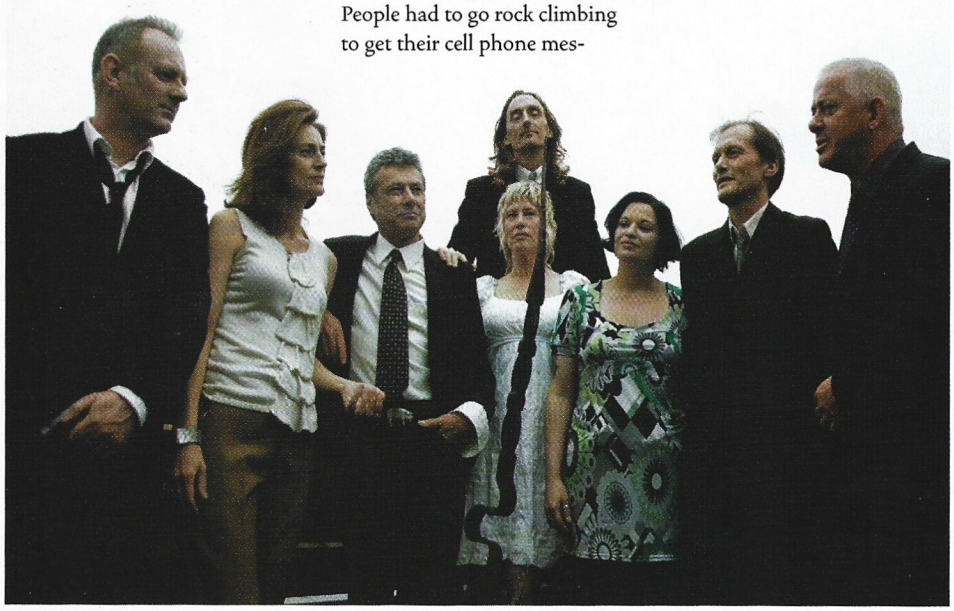
It was just this natural way of making music: People in this kind of weird, sort-of pretend family, making food, drinking and pottering about. With the Mekons, it's the reinvention that's kept it going.

Goose, Goose, Duck

The further you try and escape the modern world, in this day and age it follows you. People had to go rock climbing to get their cell phone messages. And the Lake District is used for practice bomber runs, so there you are getting your head together by an old stone circle when the very latest military technology zooms overhead. Those contrasts are in the record, too.

Pettin' the Pooch

The Mekons are like an old dog we all kick around a bit, but it's kind of nice when it's actually happening. We don't get together that often, but it's an important thing in all our lives. JOHN SCHACHT



DERRICK SANTINI

The Laser-Weirdness

Animal Collective spreads a new vibe on *Strawberry Jam*.

THE SESSIONS FOR *STRAWBERRY JAM* (Domino), Animal Collective's seventh studio album, spanned two years, several cities and a couple continents. Although the nine tracks come from disparate places, the band and producer Scott Colburn (AC's *Feels* and Arcade Fire's *Neon Bible*) shaped the songs into a bright, cohesive record that captures the frantic energy of Animal Collective's mind-expanding live shows.

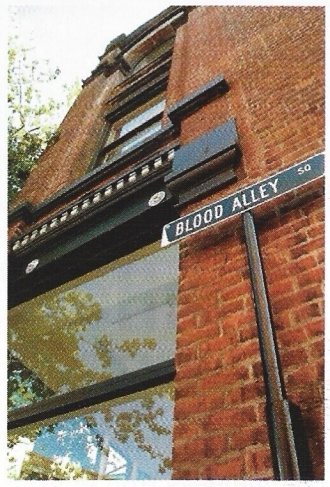
"[We wanted *Strawberry Jam*] to be a little bit more abrasive, not in a way that was hard to listen to, just something that attacked the listener more," explains Dave Portner (a.k.a. Avey Tare).

To capture this new vibe, AC has embraced a wide array of electronics. "We've been trying to push away from guitars," says Portner. "The way I have fun playing music is to really challenge myself and play instruments I'm not really that comfortable with. And the studio [Wavelab in Tucson, Ariz.] had all these cool organs and synthesizers and effects pedals... so we took the opportunity to drop the guitars even more."

So what's with the name *Strawberry Jam*? "There's just an association for us of something electronic and a laser-weird feeling with strawberry jam," says Portner. "It feels really futuristic and that's what we wanted the record to be like." AARON KAYCE

The Heat Is On

Hot Hot Heat's Steve Bays shows us around the backstreets of Vancouver.



CAILYN MURRAY

I WOKE UP AT 2 P.M. TODAY. The light and buzz from the flying pigs outside my window often keep me up, but that excuse was wearing thin on my band, who would not appreciate me being late (yet again) for our first rehearsal in weeks. I skipped my coffee and toast and ran to my car.

Gone. It had disappeared. Now with the Olympics coming up, the City of Vancouver has eight million reasons to tow your car. Fascists.

Who knew that no insurance and a modest collection of possibly paid/possibly not paid parking tickets would warrant them ruining our rehearsal? Can't afford to get my car back, too far to cab, and the bus... well, that's crazy talk.

Next logical option: wrangle me

a bike from **Pigeon Park** (the city's finest outdoor swap meet/never-ending parade of insanity). There you can find everything from that two-string bass you've been lookin' for to that single hubcap you need to complete your set.

What? 78 bones for a stolen 10-speed? No thanks. Maybe if it wasn't a Millennium—I heard they've got terrible customer support.

My long history of chronic tardiness was really starting to become an issue with the guys... It was really starting to get embarrassing. Running out of time and luck, I needed a new plan. Perhaps a peace offering?

Yes. Five dollars later I was on my way with our newest muse.

Quite proud, I headed across town with excuse in hand...

...past Ol' **Gassy Jack**...

...and through **Blood Alley** to the front steps of our rehearsal space.

As I walked through the alley named for its butchers' garbage, something occurred to me: *What kind of monster had I become?* Sleeping through rehearsal and overtly supporting black market taxidermy? I was disgusted with myself.

My bandmates were less than thrilled. But although my explanation may have only served to confuse them, I learned a valuable lesson that day: Mounting a monkey won't necessarily get it off your back.

Hot Hot Heat's fourth album Happiness, Ltd. (Sire) *is available in record stores, blood alleys, swap meets, butcher shops, impound lots and Ol' Gassy Jack's knapsack.*

JANETTE BECKMAN

SNAPSHOT ROCK

To Against Me!, the world says cheese.

IN ONE OF THE GEMS ON the major-label debut from Against Me!, frontman Tom Gabel clicks on music television and grows bored immediately: "Is there anyone thinking what I am?/Is anyone restless like me?" he roars, veins popping. Appropriately, the Butch Vig-produced *New Wave*—the Florida punk band's first disc for Sire—is a bullet train of conscious lyrics and bulldozing anthems that channel the force of Bad Religion and the spirit of Strummer/Jones. If on albums past the songs were a more collective effort, these all came from a solitary period in which Gabel hunkered down in a Gainesville hotel room. "In a way, I was just kind of trying to take a snapshot of this period in American history," he says.

You write about the war in Iraq and the current state of popular music.... What one thing triggered the songwriting?

Making the decision to change record labels and sign with Sire. I never once viewed it as an imposing or bad thing. I was just completely excited. I really wanted to approach writing the record as if it was our first record, and we were completely a new band. I just wanted to forget about any past history with the band and start fresh.

Butch Vig has produced massive records, like Nirvana's *Nevermind*. Did you mine him for stories?

Actually, we were trying to play it cool, and act like we never heard of him before *[laughs]*.

Onstage, you guys are unrelenting. What inspired your live show, and what's the goal when you hit the stage?

I think a lot of early Clash footage, where they're just going for it in such a major way was completely inspiring. I remember seeing stuff like that when I was younger and being completely blown away by it. When we walk offstage, I want people to walk away thinking, "That was awesome." WES ORSHOSKI

Shellac's New Old Sheen

Steve Albini takes a break from engineering and scrimmages with Shellac.

STEVE ALBINI DOESN'T suffer fools or overproduction. Whether from the standpoint of an engineer or owner/operator of Chicago's Electrical Audio Studio, Albini gives it to you straight. Only as guitarist and singer of Shellac does Albini wiggle it around a bit on the trio's fourth full-length, *Excellent Italian Greyhound* (Touch & Go). But even that sounds as viciously alive as anything he's recorded.

You're Midwestern born 'n' bred: what values do you hold most dear, as a man and a professional?

Not that it matters, but I was born in Pasadena. But having lived in Chicago since 1980, I'm comfortable with that mentality. The number one thing is that no one is entitled to anything. Everyone is expected to be straight with everybody else; telling you the truth. My experience with other parts of the world is that people have an agenda, that they're manipulating something to go their way—window dressing. I value plain speaking.

Do you think you approach recording Shellac differently than anyone else you record?

Since Bob [Weston, Shellac bassist] and I are both engineers, I don't have to work so hard. There's somebody else to do the heavy lifting. There's no time pressure either. With other bands, the sessions have a fixed schedule; if the band is going back to Belgium on Sunday, they have to leave with an album. If Shellac don't finish something, it's no big deal. We just put it on the shelf and in a month or a year or whenever we get together we carry on.

"I'M PROFOUNDLY LAZY."

Where'd you develop the seven-days-a-week hard work values?

Oh, no. I'm profoundly lazy. I'd rather not work hard, ever. But it's a matter of pure necessity. The men would take all this stuff away. Given my druthers, I'd rather have my hammock, barbecue, cat and girlfriend. But I like my job. That makes it easier.

Anything different with this Shellac than previous Shellacs?

No. We set up in the studio and play the songs as we do on stage. In some instances there's no singing done while recording is. In some, there is. That's my favorite way or doing it: You start in on a track and five minutes later, you have something finished. A.D. AMOROSI

ART, LIFE, DISCOURSE

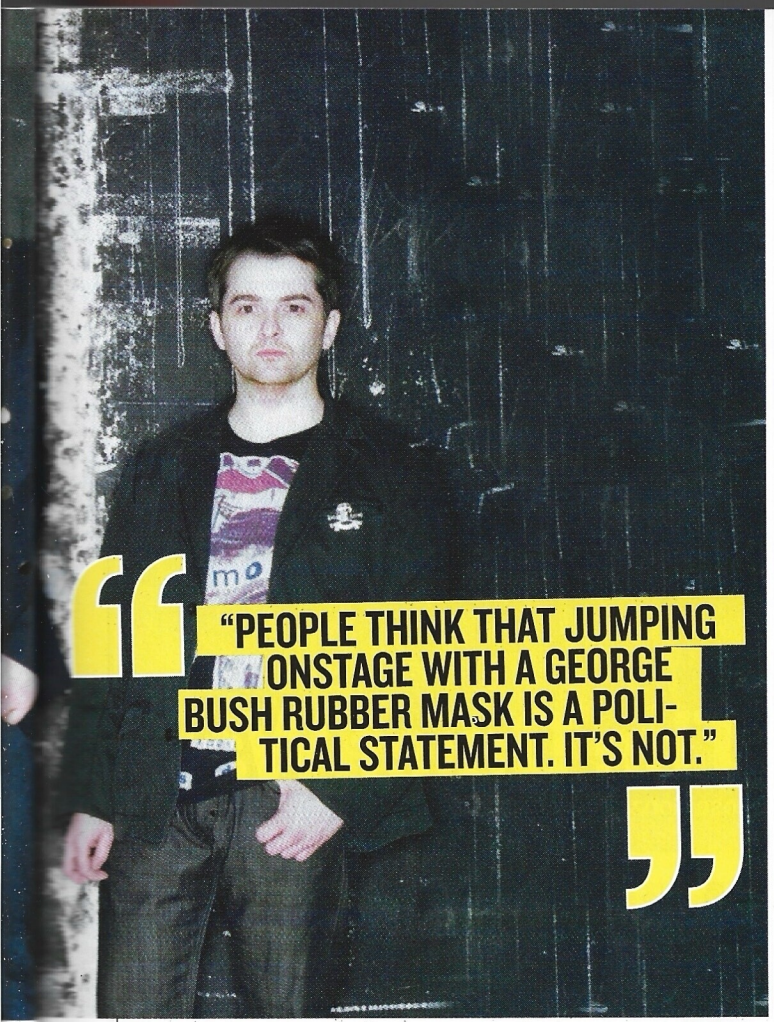
Manic Street Preachers make a public announcement... with guitars.

"I THINK THE CONCLUSIONS we came to after *Lifeblood* was that [it] was the sound of a band that didn't really believe in what they had become anymore," says Manic Street Preachers guitarist and vocalist James Dean Bradfield, in explaining the welcoming familiarity of their new CD, *Send Away The Tigers*.

"We had disowned so many of the things we were recognized for, whether it was the sound of the guitars or the lyrics. We always divulged ourselves from our history. So when it came to making this album, we wanted to disengage our brains once we had written the songs... and make a punk rock 'n' roll album again. After *Lifeblood*, I think we went through the process of reclaiming the things that were discernibly ours."

Bradfield's right: By the time of the widescreen ballads of 2004's *Lifeblood*, Manic Street Preachers were a long ways from the snarling, spitting glampunk powerhouses who came out of Wales in the early '90s in an explosion of flying scissor kicks and intelligent anthems. Some thought the band started losing their way with the disappearance of lyricist/spokesman/guitarist Richey Edwards in 1994. Certainly the band had begun maturing, going for some less harsh textures than they'd previously employed, especially on their abrasive 1994 masterwork *The Holy Bible*.

So imagine being a Manics fan and picking up *Send Away the Tigers* and seeing the return of *The Holy*



Bible's typeface in the artwork. Or spotting recent photos in the UK rock press, and seeing the trio (Bradfield, drummer Sean Moore, bassist Nicky Wire) flexing into a variation of their early '90s popstar battle fatigues. Thrilling. Then you throw on the CD, and hear a glossy mix of the explosive rockers ("Underdogs") and the stadium-filling anthems that brought them popularity ("Winterlovers"), bolstered by forays into new territory (the Clash-abilly of "Imperial Bodybags") and an epic, big-guitars single in "Your Love Alone Is Not Enough," a duet with the Cardigans' Nina Persson.

The band's political discourse hasn't changed through their history, although it may have been humanized through time. "Post-September 11th," says Bradfield, "everyone assumed things would be a bit sweet-natured to events that would fuel artists and the way we perceive politics, or the way [we] engage in politics. But I think we became bored with the way that politics are divulged in music in a very satirical way. People think that jumping onstage with a George Bush rubber mask is a political statement. It's not—it's political satire. I think we realized we didn't want to be those people. To us, that's not politics and that's not debate. It's just satire on a really puerile level."

Using the example of "Imperial Bodybags," Bradfield explains the Manics did not write it "to say, 'Hey, motherfuckers! You sent soldiers out to conquer other peoples, now you're getting your just deserts!' It didn't start out as that at all. It was juxtaposing the scene of a Midwestern family having their children arriving back in bodybags with the death of the Russian royal family. It was trying to equate humanity on two different levels with each other.

"We used to live in an age where Neil Young and Lynyrd Skynyrd wrote songs in riposte to one another! If you look at those songs, they're much more articulate than anything that's going on now, really." Until now, James. And bless you for it. TIM STEGALL

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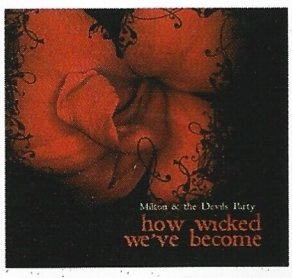
Great Bands With Great Songs

Swivel Chairs
The Slow Transmission
(TOVCD07004)

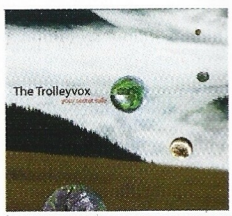
"The Amazingly talented duo of Jason Brown and Jeremy Grites, with a host of friends contributing, make their boldest and best statement yet. In this day and age of MySpace, etc., Swivel Chairs deserve their own slice of the pie - and with the quality of the songwriting on ***The Slow Transmission****, it ought to be a damn big slice." -* ***Daggerzine***

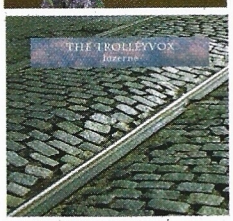


Milton & the Devils Party
How Wicked We've Become
(TOVCD07005)

"...tuneful, spikey guitar pop that is reminiscent of Marshall Crenshaw, The Police and early Elvis Costello. There are deep undercurrents of longing and yearning in the lyrics, cleverly disguised by the bright uptempo music. The themes are universally relevant, althought it's probably not a bad idea to keep a thesaurus near your ipod just in case ***- Andy Whitman Blog - Paste.com***

The Trolleyvox - *Your Secret Safe/Luzerne*
Double CD Set (TOVCD20707A&B)





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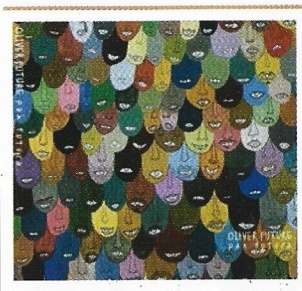

Oliver Future
Pax Futura
(TOVFPCD706)

Produced by Adam Lasus

Co-released with Fireproof Recordings

"On my short list of the Best New Bands of 2007." - ***Chris Douridas, KCRW-FM***

"This record is on alright: on point, and on its way to being one of the better surprise releases of the year." - ***8.7 out of 10 - www.lostatsea.net***

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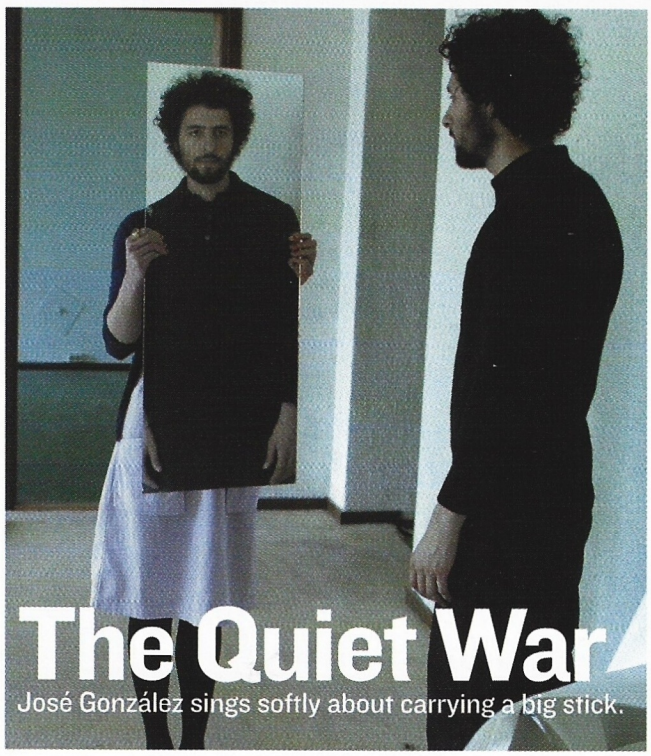


FREDERIK EGERSTRAND

The Quiet War

José González sings softly about carrying a big stick.

MUCH OF THE charm of Argentinean-born Swedish songwriter José González is his ability to construct mesmerizing songs out of the most basic material: With little more than a double-tracked whisper and the skeletal picking of a nylon-string guitar, his debut, *Veneer*, gradually earned him an international audience and comparisons to lionized folkies like Nick Drake and João Gilberto. With his sophomore LP, *In Our Nature* (Mute), González returns with the same uncomplicated pose—hunched over a classical guitar, singing hushed, aching melodies—but beneath the uncomplicated presentation, he's poised to take on the warring world at large.

The themes that bind the songs of *In Our Nature* seem evident from the record's title. What do you see as a connecting motif?

When I chose the title, it seemed that many of the songs were about the conflicts and stupidity of human nature, and the fact that we are all animals living in big cities nowadays, but also forgetting about or not thinking about our primitive side—forgetting that we are animals too. I think that some of the songs question of what it means to be human—about the role of religion, killing and love—and the duality that is deeply human.

A tune like "Killing For Love" certainly seems like it could be read in that way.

It seems like when you love something deeply, that the other side of that coin can be turned into hate and destruction, and all of these traits and qualities make us human. It's definitely inspired by a bigger picture—the wars and violence of the world. But many of the songs' lyrics are about rifts that we use to divide between "us" and "them" in other parts of our lives.

Are those difficult topics to address in your second, or is it your third, language?

I never think about writing in Spanish, and I don't think about singing in Swedish either. It's too ugly to sing in. I really wanted to extend my English vocabulary and wanted to be very comfortable about writing in English. The first time it was just songs without thinking in a way, I knew what I was writing about, but it was just often just putting works to melody. This time it was really important to me to have clear ideas come through. NATE CAVALIERI

JAMES LOOKER

CONFIDENCE (WO)MEN

Tegan and Sara reflect on their past and steady present.

LIKE THEIR PALS IN Death Cab for Cutie, Tegan and Sara currently find themselves at the height of their popularity, nearly 10 years into their career. That's no small feat when you consider how many times the charming indie pop duo were prematurely labeled "the next big thing" by the mainstream music press. Fortunately, the twin sisters from Calgary, Alberta, have weathered the hype to release *The Con*.

You started writing songs in high school. Did you think you'd keep at it this long?

SARA: It never even occurred to me that you could do this long term. In high school, the only people who talked about being professional musicians were classical musicians. It wasn't the people writing annoying punk songs.

TEGAN: Even when people asked me that [back in high school], I would usually just trail off. People would be like, "Wait, you don't know what you want to do? But you're graduating in six months!" I would just be like, "Sorry, but I *don't*."

It seems like you've reached this comfortable spot where you're successful, but not an "overnight sensation," like a lot of people suggested you'd become. Was there ever a point where you thought that would actually occur?

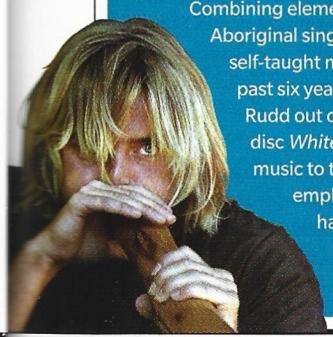
SARA: No, I don't think so. It has been a nice, comfortable climb. I remember the first time someone said to me, "You've had a lot of peaks and valleys in your career," and I was like, "What are you talking about? I'm not back in Alberta playing for 50 bucks! There isn't a high heel sticking out of the mattress when I go to bed at night." No, everything is just fine.

TREVOR KELLEY

AUTUMN DEWILDE

Taking Wing

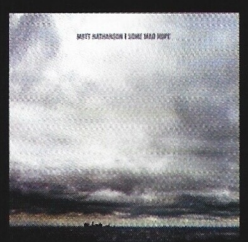
Xavier Rudd spins tales from Down Under.



IF AUSTRALIA HAS AN ANSWER TO Jack Johnson, it's Xavier Rudd. Combining elements of rock, reggae and folk music with Aboriginal singers and instruments such as Didgeridoo, this self-taught musician has been winning over listeners the past six years—most notably, Dave Matthews, who took Rudd out on DMB's latest headlining tour. Rudd's new disc *White Moth* (Anti-) takes his indefinable brand of music to the next level both sonically and creatively and emphatically proves that "world music" doesn't have to be boring. "*White Moth* is a progression spiritually," says Rudd, "and it reflects that."

JONAH BAYER

MATT NATHANSON
SOME MAD HOPE



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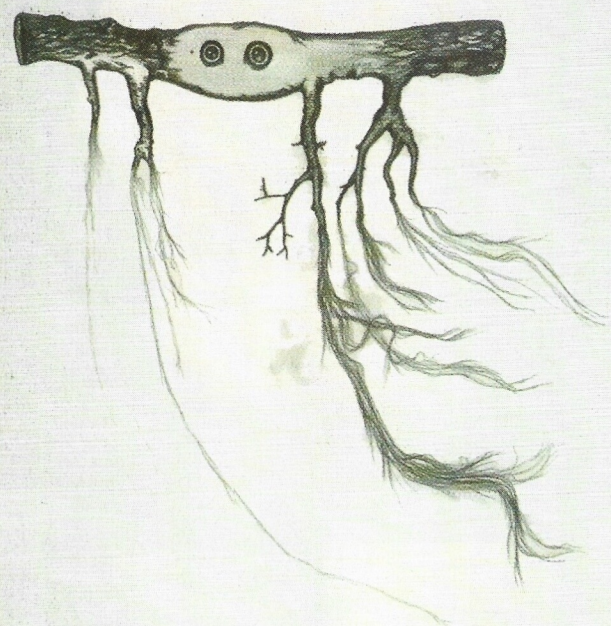

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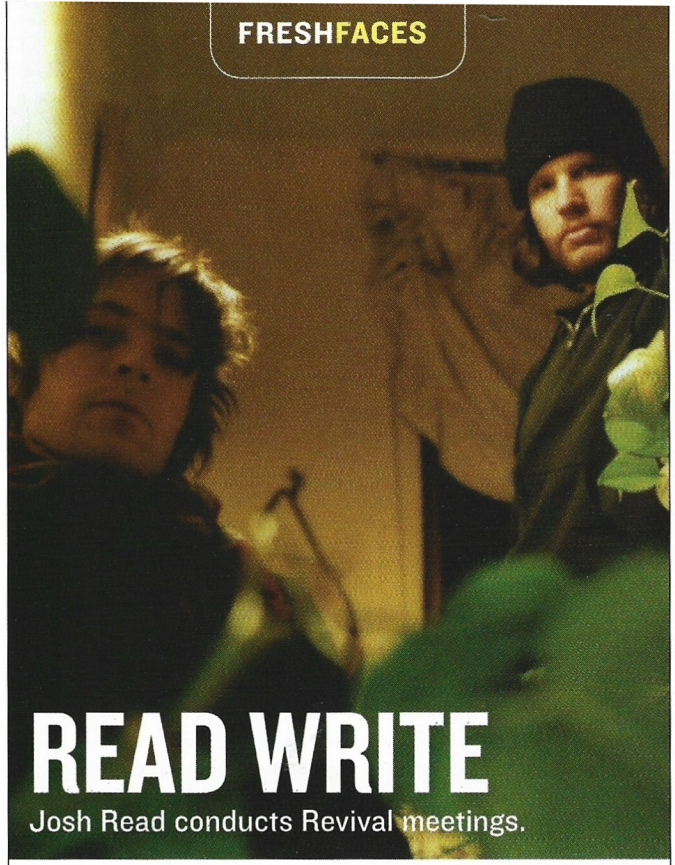
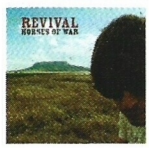


READ WRITE

Josh Read conducts Revival meetings.

Who the hell are they?



Revival began in 2004 when singer/songwriter Josh Read returned to DC from an L.A. jaunt and teamed with former Canyon bassist Evan Berodt to breathe life into Read's neo-classic rock/dusty folk/amped country songs, creating a distinct My Morning Crazy Horse vibe. Revival's debut album, *Horses of War* (Gypsy Eyes) was tracked at J. Robbins' Magpie Cage studio in Baltimore. Originally from Swaziland, South Africa, Read was a Suzuki violinist at age 2, but switched to guitar at 15. "I didn't want to go anymore because lessons were Friday afternoons, so I picked up a guitar instead."

Hometown

Washington, DC.

Best Tracks

"Fog Rolling In," a whisper/shriek waltz suggesting MMJ with Neil Young at the helm; "Daybreak," a Jack White and Jeff Tweedy tribute to the Band; "Hollywood," the Shins in visceral alt-country mode.

World up

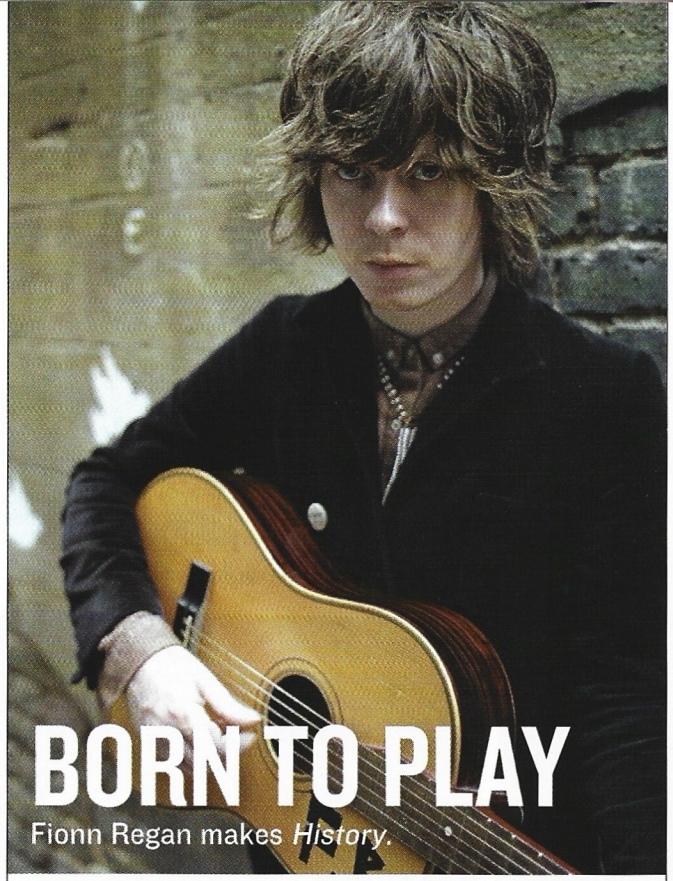
Although Revival's psychedelicized folk-rock would never be mistaken for world music, Read finds some parallels between his process and the synthesized works of Joe Strummer and Paul Simon. As a native South African, he sees the connection between the music of his cultural upbringing and the influence of his American surroundings. "I think for the past three or four years, what I've been in love with most is American music," says Read. "Traditional American music is basically traditional English and Irish music gone over a 200-year span of Americana. To me that's very interesting and very soulful."

Tours to come

Revival has opened for Cracker and Thievery Corporation side project Dust Galaxy, among others, remaining primarily in the DC area. Read is looking forward to some upcoming European dates before tackling the enormity of America, noting, "At the end of the day, if you're having shitty tour dates in Europe, at least you're in Paris, Prague and Amsterdam."

BRIAN BAKER

LAURA HENSLEY



BORN TO PLAY

Fionn Regan makes *History.*

Who the hell is he?

An Irish singer-songwriter who has been compared to Nick Drake for his guitar playing and Woody Guthrie for his songwriting, Fionn—new album: *The End of History* (Lost Highway)—is also known for his acoustic fingerpicking style. The folksy lad, whose father is a well-respected local musician, grew up in a house that would welcome any and all artists. "Our house was a magnet for every musician and poet within miles," Regan recalls. "Everybody would have their turn to play a song or rattle some coins in a jar."

Hometown

Bray, Ireland. Despite numerous reports in various magazines, the proud Irishman does not live in Brighton. "That was put out there and then spread like wildfire. I'm setting the record straight, I don't live there."

Best tracks

"Be Good or Be Gone" is a subtle gem. "I have become an aerial view of a coastal town that you once knew," he sings. Reminiscent of Al Stewart ("Year of the Cat") Regan creates a haunting world when he sings "My jumper is soaked in pig's blood, I'm coming out looking for you," on the track "Snowy Atlas Mountains."

Born to play

Raised in a house without a radio, a young Fionn would have to go to friends' homes to hear music of the day, but thanks to his upbringing in eclectic and artist-friendly surroundings, there was never a doubt that he would do anything else but sing. "I think [singing and songwriting are] in the marrow of my bones. From a very early age I remember reaching up for the piano and trying to make a connection. There was this whole other way of connecting with something that you could never point your finger at. Right from the start I knew this is what I'd be doing."

First concert

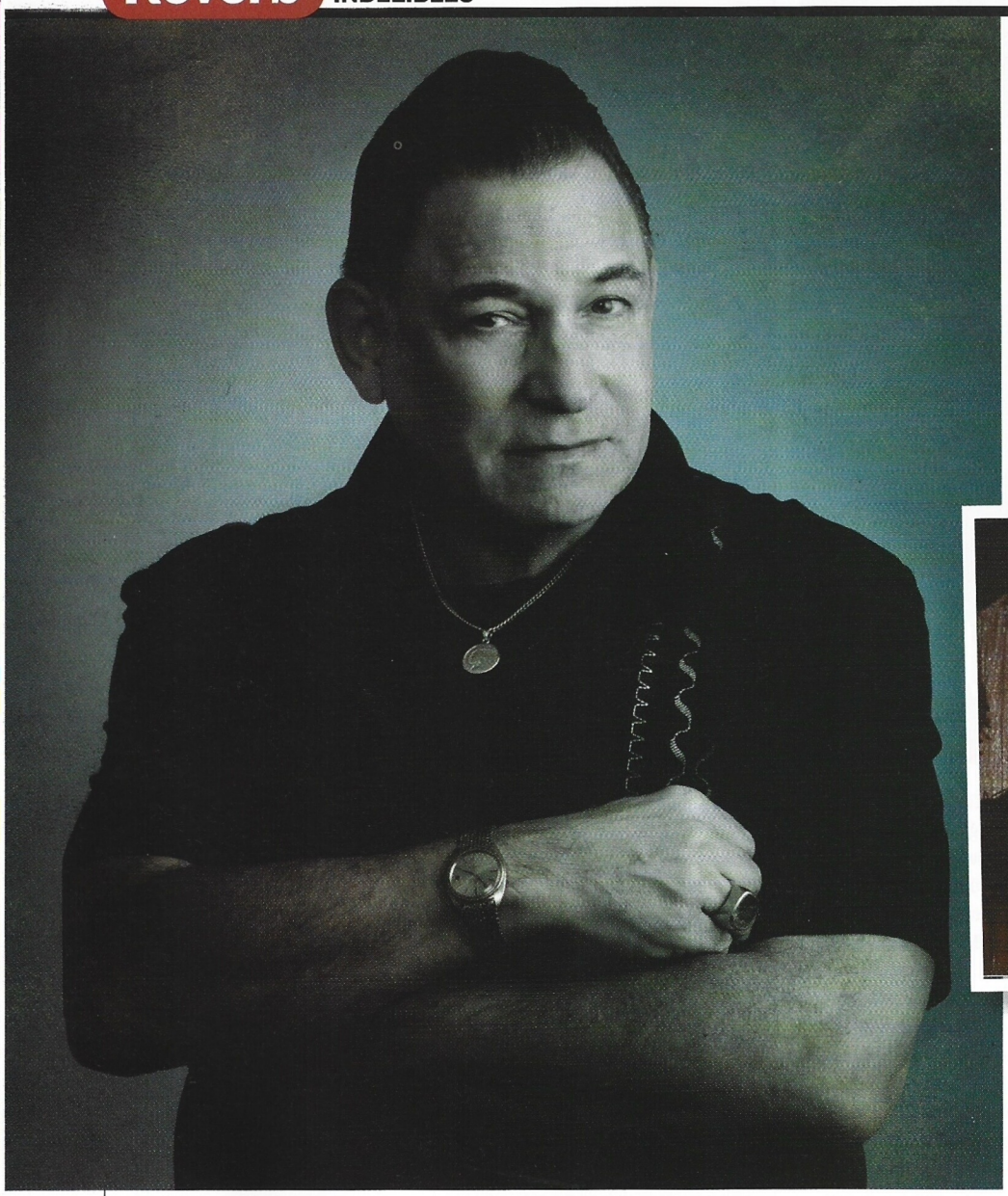
"I saw Neil Young pretty early on and I came out of there with my hair standing up."

Toured with...

Damien Rice, Beerjacket. Lisa Germano. JOSE MARTINEZ

RACHEL BEVIS

LAURA HENSLEY



(Still) Red Hot

Thirty years of doing his patented rockabilly boogie comes full circle for Robert Gordon.

BY FRED MILLS

IN 1977 A SKINNY YOUNG MAN with a gravity defying pompadour and a room-filling, Elvis-worthy voice kicked off his solo career with the old Billy Lee Riley rockabilly hit "Red Hot." The album, *Robert Gordon With Link Wray*, also kicked off a modern-day rockabilly craze whose repercussions are still being felt.

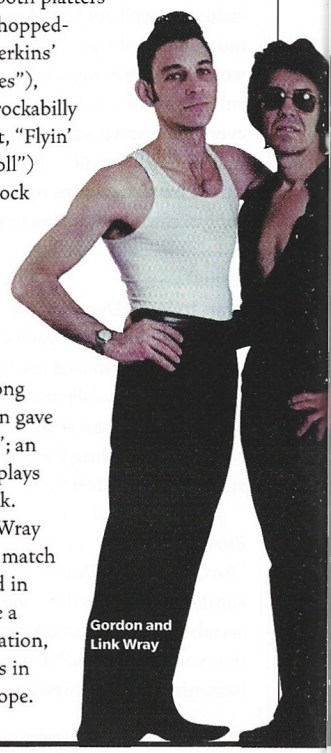
"It was exciting, man! We were doing something nobody was doing," says Gordon today. "It was like really bringing back a whole new kind of music—it *caused* a lot of excitement back then, too."

Gordon, 60, grew up in Bethesda, Md., eventually landing in New York in time for the punk explosion as vocalist for CBGB's mainstay the Tuff Darts. All along, though, he was plotting a course backwards to his true loves—roots, country and vintage rock—and upon learning that his producer, Richard Gottehrer, knew legendary guitar wildman Link Wray ("Rumble"), the lightbulb went on over his head. Recalls Gordon, "I said, 'Man, if you can get ahold of Link, that'd be great!' Link's reaction was probably, 'Who is Robert Gordon?' But it wasn't long after we got together that we became fast friends."

The Gordon-Wray alliance lasted for two records, the '77 debut and 1978's *Fresh Fish Special*. Recently repackaged on CD by the American Beat label (a little detail that rubs Gordon, who wasn't consulted for the reissue, the wrong way), both platters are a-sizzle with hopped-up twang (Carl Perkins' "Boppin' the Blues"), slapback-crazed rockabilly (another Riley hit, "Flyin' Saucer Rock & Roll") and swaggering rock (Eddie Cochran's "Summertime Blues"; Jack Scott's "The Way I Walk"). *FFS* also includes a song Bruce Springsteen gave to Gordon, "Fire"; an uncredited Boss plays piano on the track.

Gordon and Wray were an intuitive match in the studio, and in concert they were a two-headed sensation, selling out venues in America and Europe.

Bruce Springsteen (L) onstage with Robert Gordon



Gordon and Link Wray

Yet with Wray living up to his "wild-man" reputation onstage Gordon eventually had enough. "In the studio he was controllable and a pleasure. But I'm a stickler for the sound onstage, and Link plays one way—up the volume goes! It just got very difficult with Link, so that's why it ended."

"MOST OF THE TIME WE WERE IN A PRETTY CRAZY PLACE."

The singer subsequently teamed with veteran English session guitarist Chris Spedding, who Gordon says appealed to him because he was equally versed in roots and modern sounds. The two recorded and toured behind 1979's *Rock Billy Boogie* and 1980's *Bad Boy*, although the latter's title proved prophetic and that partnership eventually fizzled too. As Gordon ruefully puts it, of the pair's excesses, "Most of the time we were in a pretty crazy place, man."

In recent years Gordon has found his primary audience in Europe. He also eventually reconciled with Spedding, and last summer the two journeyed to Nashville to cut a collection of Elvis tunes in anticipation of the upcoming 30th anniversary of the King's death.

The sessions for *It's Now or Never* yielded 15 sharply etched numbers—standout tracks include "Don't Be Cruel," "(You're So Square) Baby I Don't Care" and "Peace In the Valley"—and making the album even more authentic sounding is the presence of Elvis' former backing vocal group the Jordanaires. In that regard the project brings things full circle for Gordon, who'd previously enlisted the Jordanaires' talents back in '78 for *Fresh Fish Special*.

"They hadn't sung a bunch of those songs since back in the day so they were listening to versions of them to refresh their memories and that made it fun," says Gordon. "And they did remember me! It was pretty amazing because I don't look *anything* like I did back then."

Of the spark he helped reignite three decades ago and the rock flames he continues to fan to this day, Gordon is quick to point out that he "never really set out to do a rockabilly trip. I've done all kinds of stuff on my albums. But we were there at the outset of it, and it has opened doors for people who probably wouldn't have gotten another shot at it. It's amazing how many new acts as well as older acts that are out there now. It's really cool, man." **H**

ROBERT GORDON

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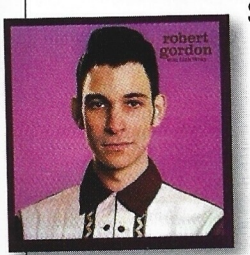


Robert Gordon With Link Wray (Private Stock, 1977)

Fresh Fish Special (Private Stock, 1978)

(NOTE: both albums reissued on single CD, American Beat, 2007)

Rock Billy Boogie (RCA, 1979)

Bad Boy (RCA, 1980)

Are You Gonna Be the One (RCA, 1981)

Live At the Lone Star (New Rose, 1989)

Greetings From New York City (New Rose, 1991)

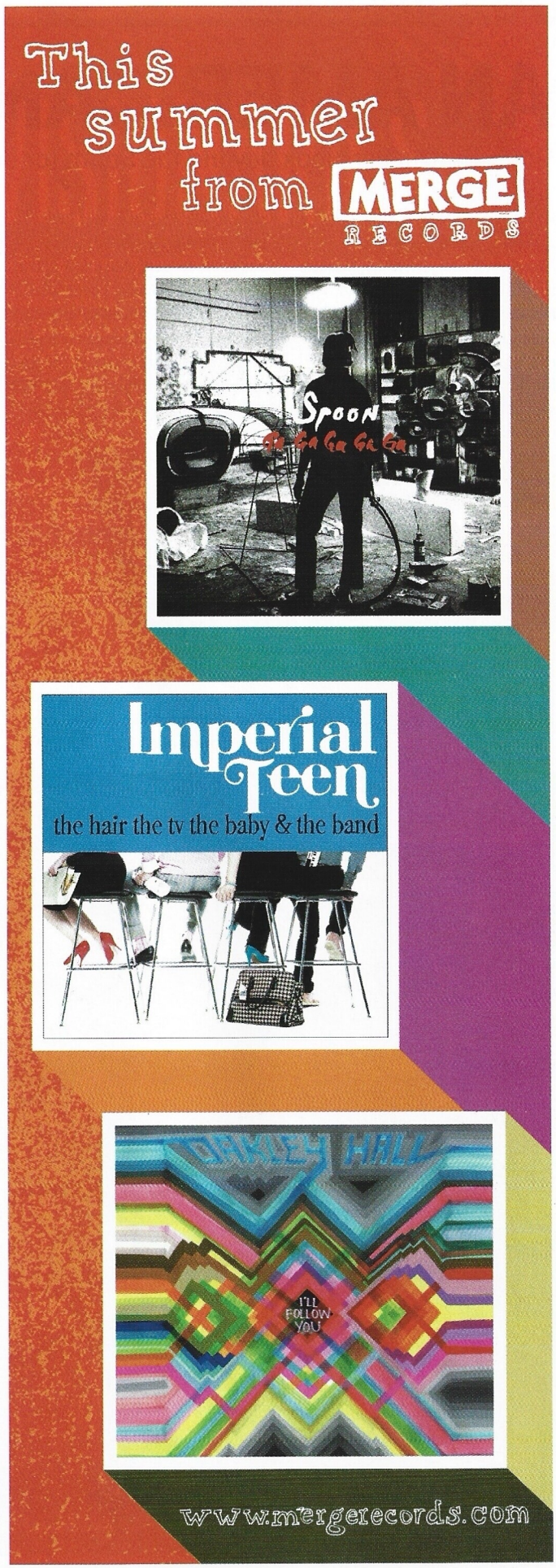
All for the Love of Rock 'n' Roll (Viceroy, 1994)

Robert Gordon (Llist, 1997)

The Lost Album Plus (Bear Family, 1998)

Satisfied Mind (Koch, 2005)

It's Now or Never (Rykodisc, 2007)



AN AMERICAN BAND

Drive-By Truckers look beyond the South for inspiration.

AFTER MAKING THREE "long, sprawling albums" about the American South, Drive-By Truckers surprised fans last year with *A Blessing and A Curse*, a collection of 11 largely unconnected Stones-y rock songs. But anyone looking for clues about the Truckers' next album won't find them there. "It's the polar opposite of *A Blessing and a Curse*," says singer/guitarist Patterson Hood with a laugh. "It's looking long and sprawling and narrative-driven. But it also doesn't sound like the records before *Blessing*."

Hood says the currently untitled album will have a more obvious early country and R&B influence than the band's previous work. In part, that's due to the departure of guitarist Jason Isbell, who has been replaced by touring member John Neff on guitar and pedal steel. But the biggest change to the Truckers' lineup is the addition of keyboardist Spooner Oldham, the Muscle Shoals legend who has played with Aretha Franklin, Wilson Pickett and Neil Young, among many others.

"Neff is a different kind of player than Jason," explains Hood. "There's a lot more breathing room and space between the notes. And Spooner is a spacious player too. Because of that, this album has more harmonics on it. There's some quiet moments, which we've never been known for, but then we can turn around and be as loud as ever."

Although the band is recording in Athens, Hood describes the new album as more of an American rock and roll record than a Southern one. So far, they've written songs set in San Francisco and Monument Valley, as well as Tennessee. "We've been on the road for the better part of 10 years now, so other parts of America are definitely affecting the songs," he says.

Still, Hood realizes he'll always be known as a Southern musician—and he doesn't really mind. "A lot of my favorite books or music have a definite sense of place about them," he says. "The Ramones were very obviously from Queens and Bruce Springsteen had a lot of songs about New Jersey. You write about what you know, and those are the roads I know best." HAL BIENSTOCK

ALBUM TITLE: TBD (New West)
RELEASE DATE: January 2008 (tentative)
PRODUCED BY: David Barbe
NEW SONG TITLES: "A Ghost to Most," "The Opening Act," "Set Destructive Zone"

Drive By Truckers (L-R): Patterson Hood, Mike Cooley, Spooner Oldham, Brad Morgan, John Neff, Shonna Tucker

TED BARRON

TIFT MERRITT

ALBUM TITLE: *Another Country* (Fantasy)
RELEASE DATE: early 2008
PRODUCED BY: George Drakoulias
NEW SONG TITLES: "Another Country," "My Heart is Free"

TIFT MERRITT IS four days into recording *Another Country*, her third studio album (out on Fantasy in early 2008). She is holed up in a house in Laurel Canyon, just a stone's throw away from where Joni Mitchell and Graham Nash recorded landmark albums. Still, the songs she's working on come from an altogether different setting, an apartment in Paris' 10th Arrondissement where last year she tried to decide hard questions like, "Am I still a singer?" and "Where do I go from here?"

On professional hiatus after 2004's *Tambourine*, Merritt lived by herself for three months in a rented flat in Paris. Woken early by the sound of street cleaners, "I would get a coffee and write for two or three hours. Then, I would take the camera and wander around or maybe go and see an exhibit, and come back and write again."

Living among strangers gave Merritt a new appreciation for casual human interaction: a smile, a laugh, a passing joke. "You realize that the distance between two people is as far sometimes as the distance between countries."

Now, Merritt is translating these inward-focused ideas into her rowdy country sound with the help of her longtime band, producer George Drakoulias and erstwhile Dylan guitarist Charlie Sexton. "We're trying to stay true to the emotional intentions of the song, and not over-rock them," she says. But, she adds, don't expect much overt Frenchness in the music: "It's not like there's going to be accordion in every song." JENNIFER KELLY

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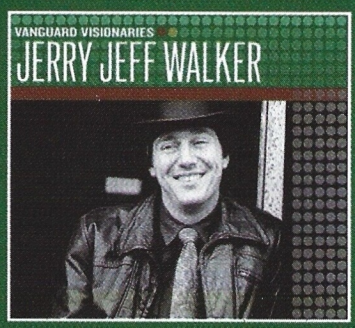

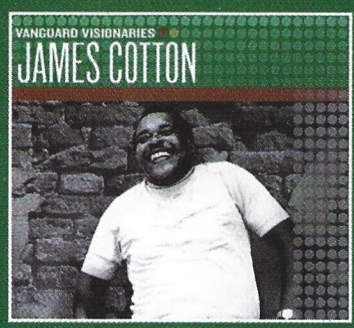

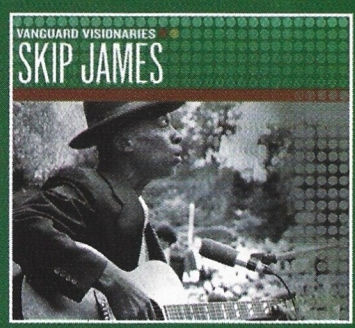

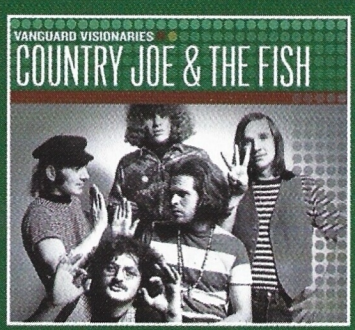

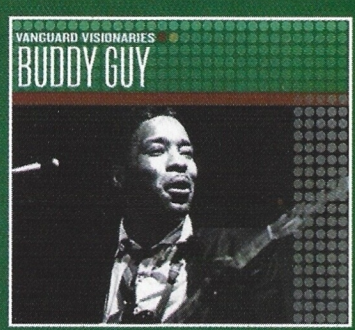

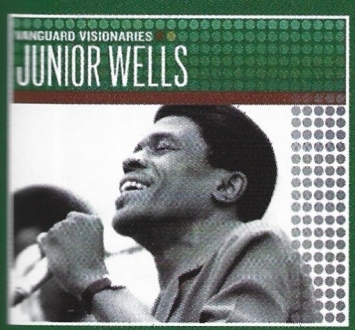

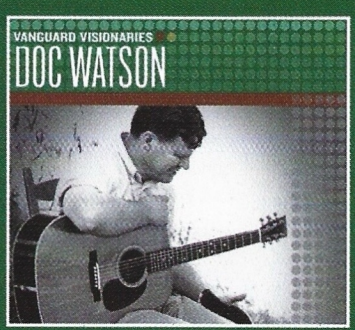

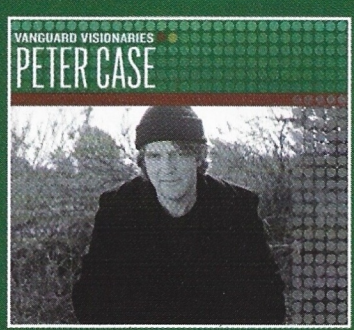

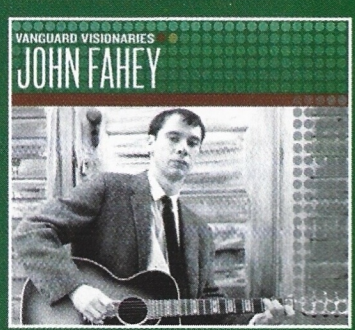

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10 THINGS YOU DIDN'T KNOW ABOUT:

JOSH RITTER

PHOTO BY RAY GORDON

Josh Ritter's latest, entitled *The Historical Conquests of Josh Ritter* (Sony BMG/Victor), ironically, isn't about the singer-songwriter's past exploits. Rather, he's concerned with feats of historical figures and fictional characters—just about anyone *but* himself. Yet in another irony, the record is all about him "wanting to be someone else in my songs." Anyone wanting to know more about Ritter will have to glean what they can from tales of gunslingers and missile silos, Ritter's ebullient vocals and the varied arrangements he and pal/producer/bandmate Sam Kassirer chose as context for the conquests. Or you can dig this list of 10 tidbits Ritter wrote for HARP.

1) I was a very bad pole-vaulter. For a brief period of my otherwise stellar high school career, I was a bad-to-dangerous pole-vaulter. It's not an easy sport, but very rarely is it possible to actually miss the mat.

2) One of my earliest memories is of my father (who was trained as a veterinarian) "fixing" the dog on the kitchen table. I remember wondering how he'd known the dog was broken to begin with.

3) I am an audio book freak. Anything is good, from histories of India and Devotional to biographies of Teddy Roosevelt. I take them running. As long as it's unabridged I'll give it a shot. I also have a fantasy that one day I can be an audio book reader.

4) My great-great uncle invented Lifesavers candy. In his bathtub. Subsequent attempts to follow in the family footsteps, conducted in hotel chains around the world, have failed.

5) My father's side of the family came to America in 1741. My mother's side pioneered across the country through Minnesota and South Dakota.

6) My brother Lincoln is a genius. At least in relation to everyone else I know. His wife, Chana Joffe-Walt, is a great reporter for National Public Radio.

7) My current favorite authors are Muriel Spark, Pete Dexter, Philip Roth and Wendell Berry.

8) My first public performance was a high school talent show. I sang "Everybody Must Get Stoned." It is the only time I ever played the harmonica.

9) I studied classical violin for 13 years, but could never learn how to note read. Instead I bought recordings and learned every piece I ever played by ear.

10) I wrote several verses of "To the Dogs or Whoever" off of my new album in a bar in Oslo, Norway, on a day off. There were a couple of merchant marines talking about Lagos, Nigeria, across the room and the rhythm of those words got me started.

"ONE OF MY EARLIEST MEMORIES IS OF MY FATHER 'FIXING' THE DOG ON THE KITCHEN TABLE."

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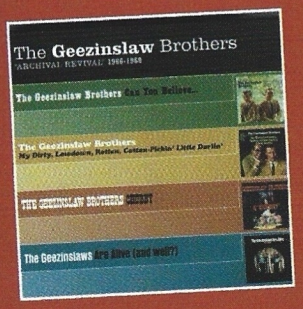
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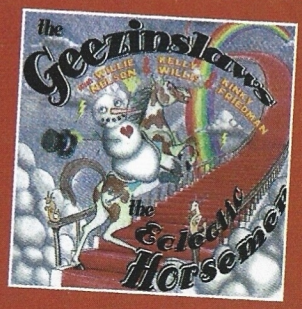

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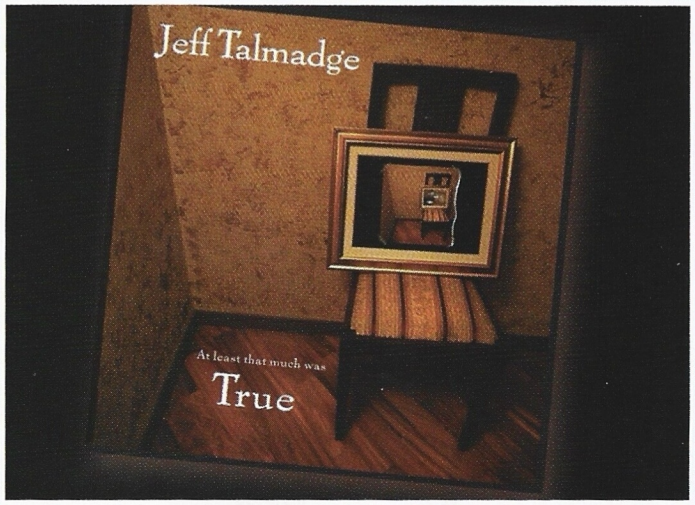

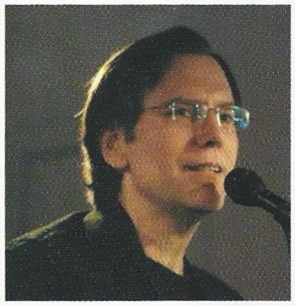

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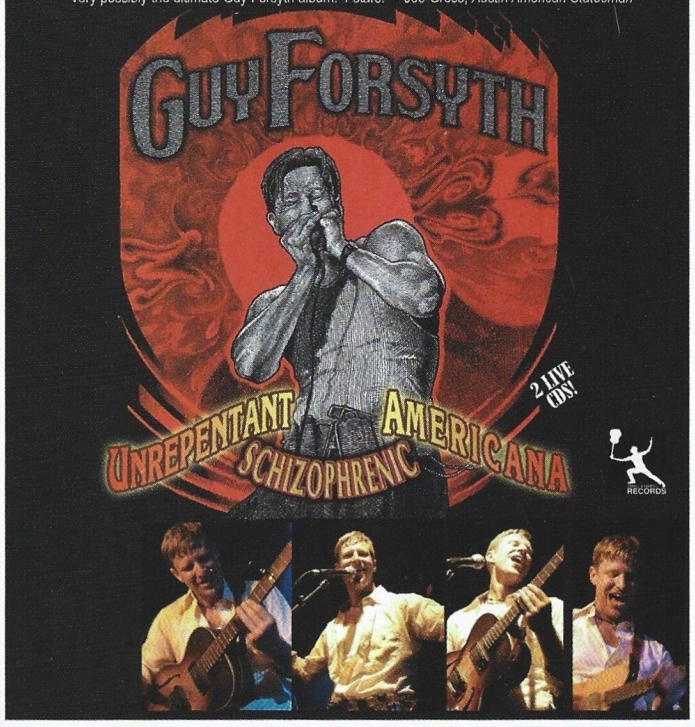

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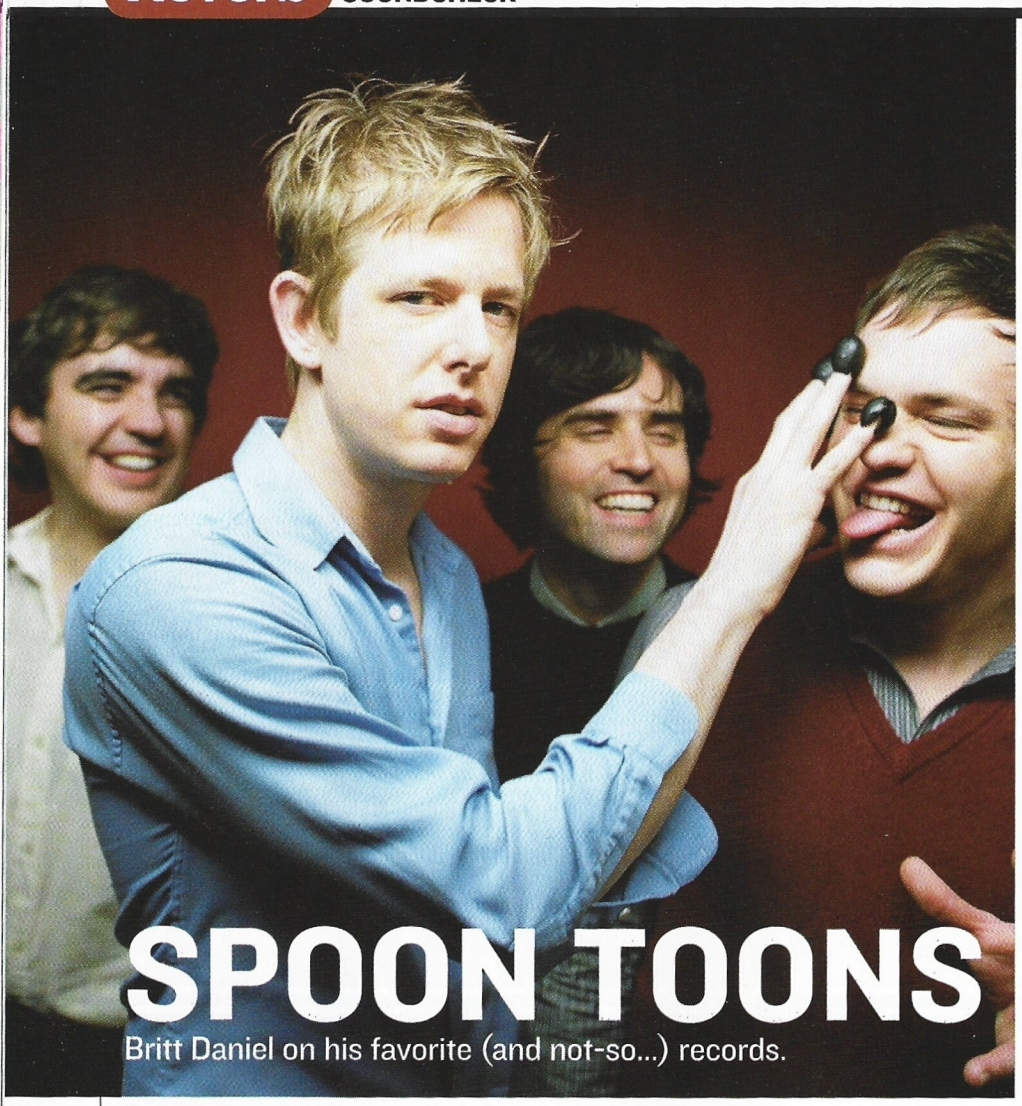


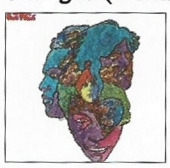
SPOON TOONS

Britt Daniel on his favorite (and not-so...) records.

AUTUMN DE WILDE

ON A RAINY JUNE EVENING, I'm pounding on the front door of Britt Daniel's Portland home. After what seems like an hour (really about five minutes) the door opens and the Spoon frontman graciously invites me in, past a large box filled with multiple copies of the band's sixth album, *Ga Ga Ga Ga Ga* (Merge). In a few hours Daniel will depart for some gigs in Canada, but he kindly sits down with *Harp* to spin a stack of records—and dish about his love for Arcade Fire and how he once ripped off Moles/Cardinal frontman Richard Davies.

"Alone Again Or," LOVE, *Forever Changes* (Elektra, 1967)



I know this song, now I just have to figure out if it's Love's version or the Damned's version. OK, this is Love...but I heard the Damned's version first. I bought this record the very first time I went to London. I do like this song a lot and a few of the other songs, but a lot of this record is a bit too hippy-dippy for me. All of the bands I have heard cover this song do it pretty faithfully though. The Damned did a video for it.

"Lady Sniff," BUTTHOLE SURFERS, *Psychic, Powerless...Another Man's Sac* (Touch & Go, 1986)

Twisted *and* from Texas? It has to be the Butthole Surfers. This is one of their early records, isn't it? These guys were just doing something that was so totally original back then. I went to see them in 1988 in Austin when they opened for the Flaming Lips. It was one of those times when I needed to get away from my high school life. It was definitely a formative gig for me.

"Neighborhood #1," ARCADE FIRE, *Funeral* (Merge, 2004)

[*Laughs*] I knew this one about three seconds into it. It's the Arcade Fire. This is one of my favorite records of the past 10 years, probably one of my favorite records ever. It took me a little while to get into this record, The first time I played it I was like, "Um... this is good." Then I went back to it about a month later and I was like "Wait, this is *really* good." Then, like a month later, I was like "OK, I am *obsessed* with this record!"

"THIS NEW RYAN ADAMS RECORD IS NOT SOMETHING I WOULD EVER LISTEN TO."

"Goodnight Rose," RYAN ADAMS, *Easy Tiger* (Lost Highway, 2007)

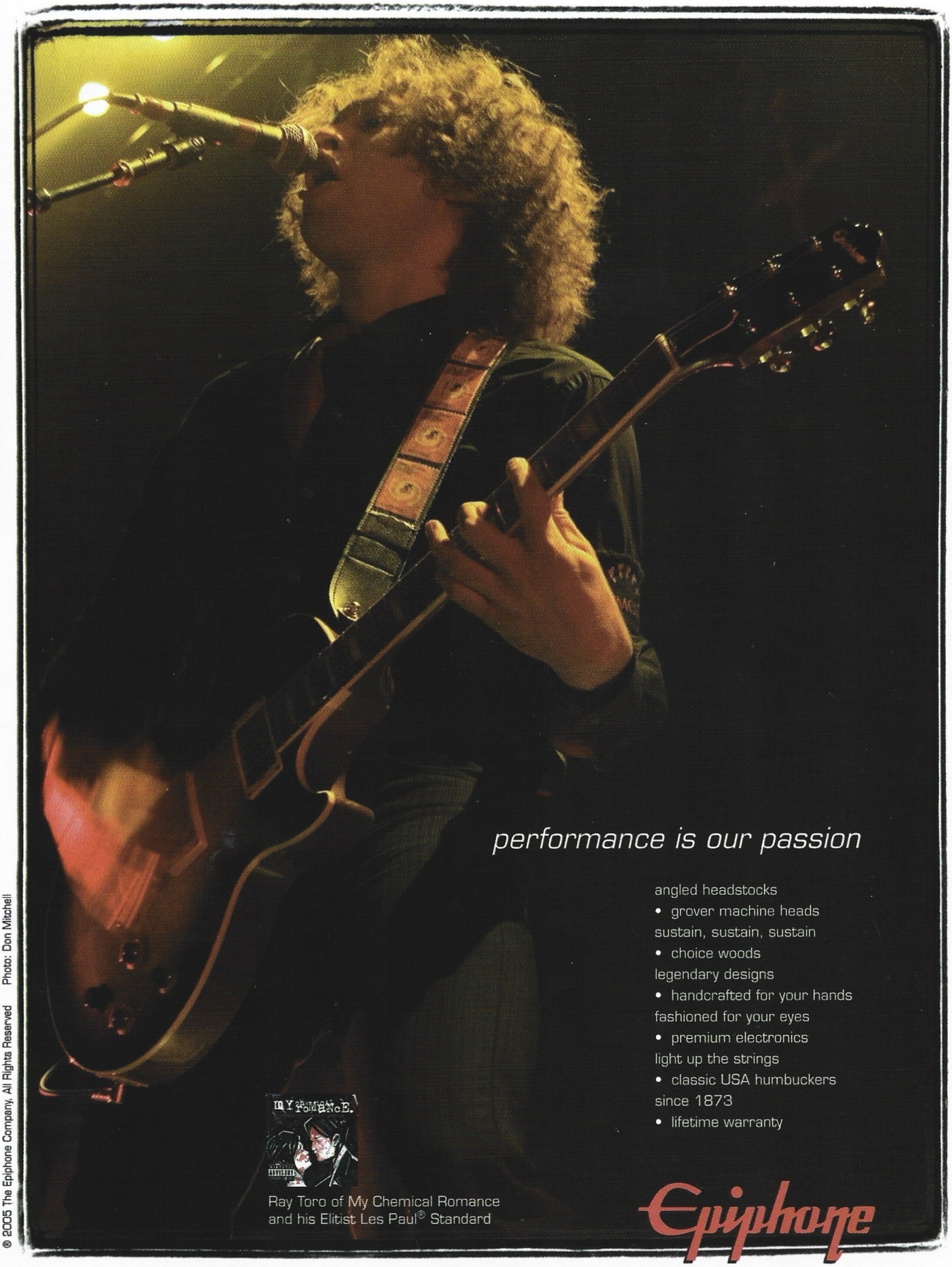
It's Ryan Adams, isn't it? Yeah, it sounds so like, "*I wanna be a star!*" I liked Whiskeytown though; I really liked their records. The first time I saw them was [when they taped] *Austin City Limits*. It was great. This new Ryan Adams record is not something I would ever listen to.

"If You Believe in Christmas Trees," CARDINAL, *Cardinal* (Flydaddy, 1994)

Don't tell me! I know who this is; I just can't think of it right now. They had this band and it was this guy and this other guy. He sounds a lot like Barry Gibb at times. Is it the Moles? No wait—this is *Cardinal*. I totally remember this record; in fact, I once ripped off something that he did. Richard Davies used to do this thing where he would sing one verse and put a really high falsetto over top of it. Yeah, I ripped that off.

"Raised by Wolves," VOXTROT, *Raised by Wolves* (Cult Hero, 2005)

I know these guys. I think they're from Austin. It's Voxtrot, right? I remember seeing them the first time and thinking, "Wow, this guy really sounds *a lot* like Morrissey." The second time I saw them it was way different. It was more rock 'n' roll and even a bit dancey at times, and really upbeat. I saw them once at Sound Team's studio during SXSW and they were really good. I haven't heard their new record yet but I would like to. TIM HINELY



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Artifacts

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COME AS YOU WERE

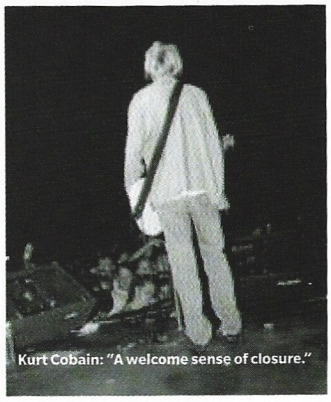
Michael Azerrad and AJ Schnack resurrect and reconstruct Kurt Cobain in *About A Son.* BY GILLIAN G. GAAR

WHEN MUSIC JOURNALIST Michael Azerrad first knocked on Kurt Cobain's door to do an interview for *Rolling Stone*, "I came at it with a lot of trepidation. I knew Kurt was from this obscure corner of the world, very far from where I grew up. And I was a little older than he was. He was, I guess, a heroin addict, and he screamed and broke guitars. I really, really didn't know what to expect when I met him.

"But the second we started talking, I said to myself, 'I *know* this guy, and furthermore, I like this guy.' And I think he felt the same way toward me. It was a really great conversation we had." So great, in fact, that Azerrad was later tapped to write the band's official biography, *Come As You Are: The Story of Nirvana*, published in October 1993.

Lay your hands on me: Saint Kurt, hoisted aloft by true believers.

Cobain's death six months later was "devastating" to Azerrad, and he put away the hours of interviews he'd done for his book. But when he mentioned the tapes in passing to filmmaker AJ Schnack, during an interview for Schnack's 2002 documentary about They Might Be Giants, the director immediately became excited. "I knew that no one else had this interview," Schnack explains. "These were the most intimate and complete conversations that anyone did with Kurt in his life. And you would probably get a glimpse of Kurt that you wouldn't from something he was doing in a one-off interview. I felt [these tapes] were really an important piece of cultural material."



Kurt Cobain: "A welcome sense of closure."

Azerrad agreed, and in 2004 the two began work on what would become the film *Kurt Cobain: About A Son*. It premiered at the Toronto International Film Festival in 2006 and made its Seattle debut at this year's Seattle International Film Festival prior to opening theatrically in the United States this fall.

It's certainly the most personal look at Cobain ever presented in a documentary, as well as the most idiosyncratic. "It was never going to be about the nuts and bolts of the band," says Schnack. "Michael's discussions with Kurt were much more of a personal history, a personal accounting of his life. I just tried to let the interviews, and Michael's book, point me in the right direction."

So, while Cobain's interviews provide the narration, the footage—shot in the Washington state locations where he spent most of his life (Aberdeen, Olympia, Seattle)—references themes that come up in the conversations, with the camera moving almost languorously inside the places where Cobain lived and worked pre-fame (such as an oceanside hotel where he briefly cleaned rooms). Those familiar with Azerrad's book will also recognize that footage touches on things mentioned in the book, but that aren't in the film's narration, such as Cobain's stint as a high school wrestler. "There's a lot of imagery in the film, but there are no captions saying, 'This opening shot is looking out the window of the house that the interviews were conducted in,'" says Schnack.

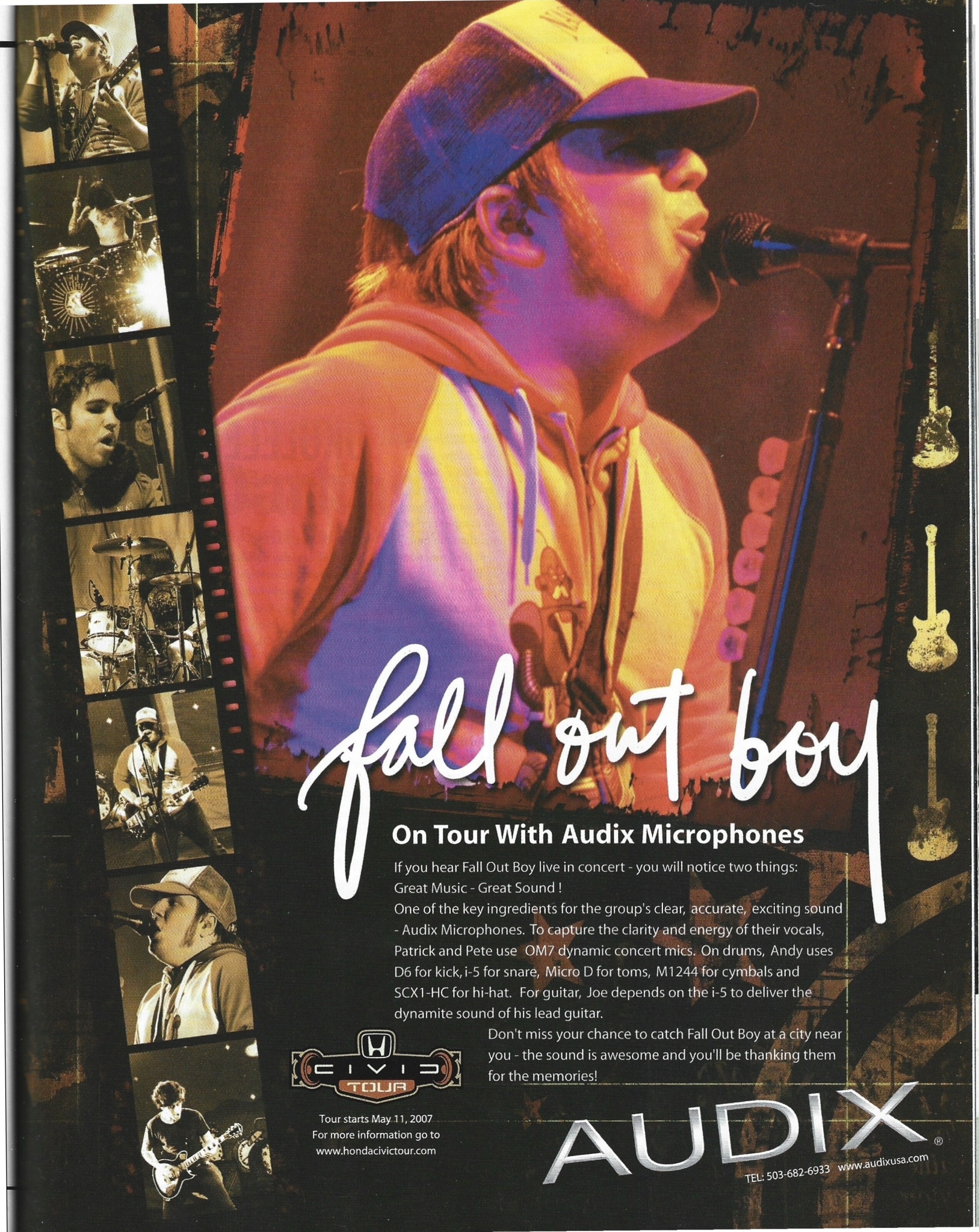
About a Son contains no footage of Nirvana (some of Charles Peterson's iconic photos are used) and no Nirvana music is used; the soundtrack, on Barsuk Records is compiled from Cobain's musical influences (Melvins, Queen, Bowie) along with an original score by Steve Fisk and Ben Gibbard. Schnack calls his film "an artistic tone poem" about Cobain and his milieu and says that since it is *not* a Nirvana documentary, neither the surviving members of the band nor the Cobain estate were involved "because we were not asking them for permission [for music/film clearances]." He adds, however, that the estate has "generally been supportive" of the movie.

"The thing about making this film," says Schnack, "is that it's automatically something that challenges people's expectations, because we have such an idea in our heads about what a rock doc is supposed to be." And for Azerrad, who describes his role as "the dramaturge" (more officially, he's co-producer), the film brought a welcome sense of closure.

"Hearing those tapes again, I was reminded of the guy I had grown to like and connected so strongly with," says Azerrad. "It erased years of anguish right there. And then this movie just takes that to a completely other level."

"THIS FILM CHALLENGES PEOPLE'S EXPECTATIONS ABOUT WHAT A ROCK DOC IS SUPPOSED TO BE."

PHOTOS COURTESY OF THE PRODUCERS OF KURT COBAIN: ABOUT A SON



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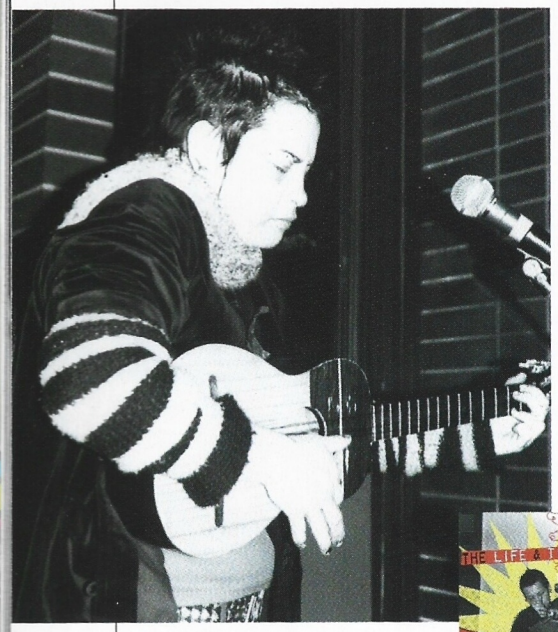
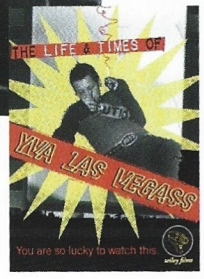
Quite Contrary

Wiley Underdown's Yva Las Vegass doc gets what-for... from the woman herself.





WORLD PREMIERES ARE nerve-wracking enough. For Wiley Underdown, the premiere of his directorial debut *The Life and Times of Yva Las Vegass* was heightened by the fact that he'd been tweaking the film up to its unveiling, the screening was in Las Vegass' one-time home of Seattle as part of this year's Seattle International Film Festival (SIFF), and the audience was full of the singer's friends.

"I thought the evening started out great," he says. But the projector went on the blink, resulting in a half-hour delay. And by the film's end, some had taken great exception to Underdown's portrayal of the occasionally confrontational Las Vegass. During the Q&A, "they just completely laid into me about the fact that I was making fun of Yva, and basically how dare I, as a heterosexual white male, make this movie...it was very weird. There were just downright hostile." Las Vegass herself was equally unamused.

Perhaps that's consistent with the volatility that sometimes surrounds the Venezuelan-born singer/musician, who busked on the streets of Seattle before landing in Krist Novoselic's first post-Nirvana band Sweet 75. After one album, the band split and Las Vegass was back singing on the streets, which is where Underdown first encountered her. "I just heard this woman singing in this huge, huge voice," he says. "And I was shocked to find a five-foot woman with a pretty significant Mohawk playing this tiny instrument." Underdown was drawn to Las Vegass' story, seeing it as a chance to explore the nature of the artistic temperament, "where someone can be a complete genius but can be really difficult to deal with or have a hard time functioning in day-to-day life."

Novoselic declined to be interviewed, but other musicians Las Vegass worked with (such as Children of the Revolution) are shown freely admitting that while they admire Las Vegass' talents, they don't want to be caught up in her off-stage dramas. Before the screening, Las Vegass herself told *Harp*, "It's very easy to use the manic and paranoid episodes that I had [in the film's interviews]. But that's all right, it's a movie about me," and, according to Underdown, she has since emailed an apology. Underdown still hopes to find distribution, and wryly notes of the premiere, "I can't say it was fun, but according to some it will go down in the history of SIFF!" GILLIAN G. GAAR

UKULELE PAYDAY

Clem Snide's Eef Barzelay scores an HBO film *Rocket Science*.

CLEM SNIDE FRONTMAN Eef Barzelay makes his film score debut with Jeffrey Blitz's quirky coming-of-age movie, *Rocket Science* (out Aug. 10 on Picture House/HBO). Barzelay punctuated the protagonist's trials by using eclectic instrumentation in interesting combinations. "The kid is lovable and goofy and stutters so it seemed obvious to get some musical sounds that fit that," explains Barzelay. "I had this little ukulele that I never played; somehow I tuned it to an open tuning and started picking little things out on it and that felt really good," he says. "And Jeffrey had gotten a little bee in his bonnet about the accordion... and then at one point I started using a kazoo. The ukulele and the kazoo were my bedrock." So how did this experience differ from Barzelay's work in the traditional music biz? "I found it very exciting, liberating in a way. And I was getting paid. That was very inspiring." AARON KAYCE

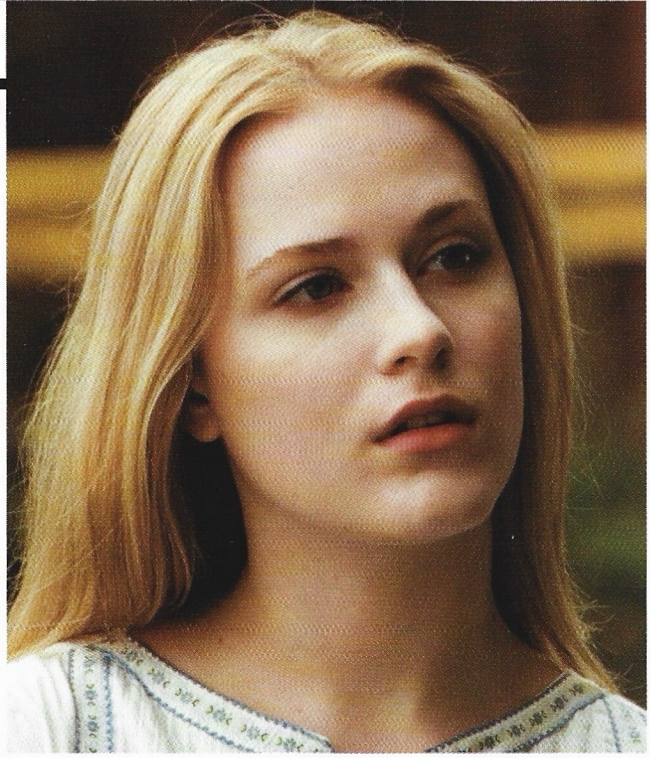
ROCKY TALKIE

Kinski complets silent *Berlin* film soundtrack.

WHEN SEATTLE'S KINSKI WAS ASKED TO PROVIDE a live score for two screenings of Walther Ruttman's 1927 silent film *Berlin: Symphony of a City* at the recent Seattle International Film Festival (SIFF), there was no hesitation. "Our band's history is always to say yes to whatever is offered to us," says the band's guitarist, Chris Martin. "And we said yes to this before anyone had even picked a film!"

Kinski was first asked to consider scoring some Danish films for SIFF, says Martin, "but they had really tight narratives; one had six-minute people-talking-in-the-kitchen scenes, and we thought 'What are we going to do with that?'" Then *Berlin*, a work Martin knew from his film school days, was suggested. "It's basically just a collection of images; there's no narrative or anything. It's pretty open-ended, so that was perfect for what we wanted to do."

The Ruttman film takes the viewer through one day in the metropolis, and to complement scenes of people going to work, dining and seeking out an evening's entertainment, the group's score was "sort of a hodgepodge of Kinski stuff, some unused fragments, as well as some improv moments. There's a couple pieces that do fit the exact action, but we built in some places where we can stretch out." GILLIAN G. GAAR



Oh! Darling

At 19, actress Evan Rachel Wood is in bloom in *Across the Universe*.

DEPENDING ON which tabloid you pass in the supermarket, wholesome-faced Evan Rachel Wood is either a homewrecker who destroyed Marilyn Manson's marriage to burlesque revivalist Dita Von Teese, or the girl who waited patiently on the sidelines until that union crumbled. In any event, Wood and Manson have embraced the fact that their relationship is headline fodder: In his new video for "Heart Shaped Glasses"—which was inspired by Wood—the couple simulate sex as they're doused in blood.

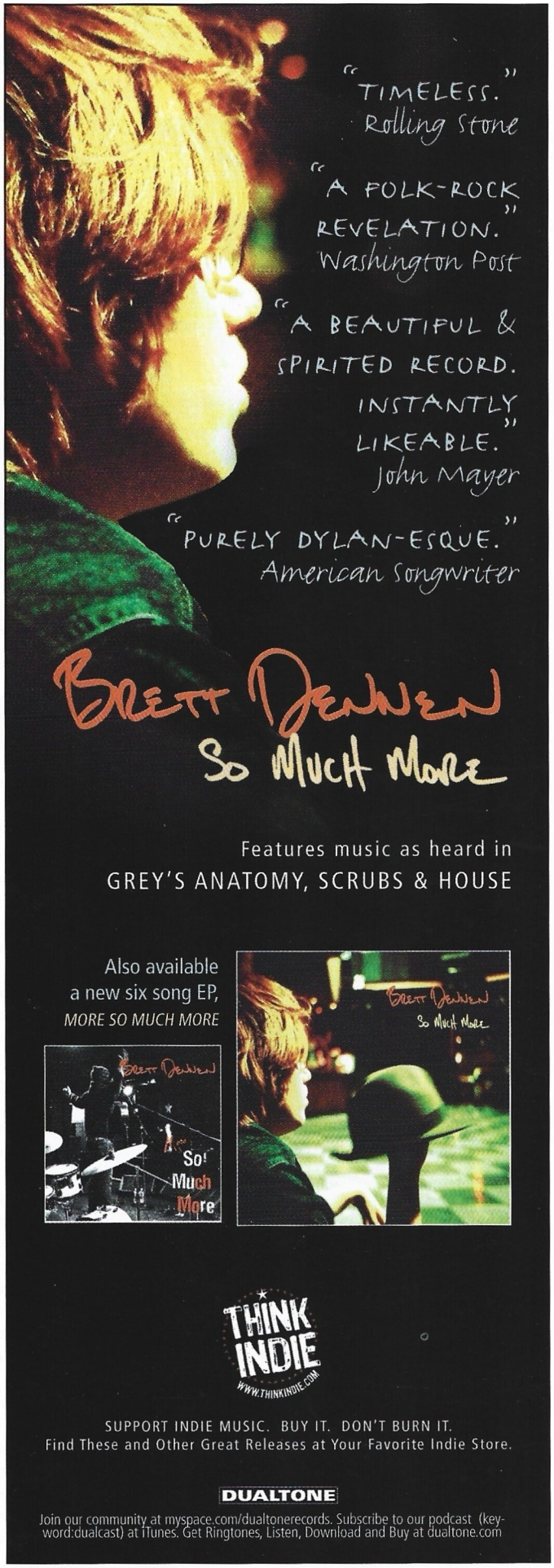
"The funny thing is, people started coming up to us and they were convinced that we actually were having sex," Wood laughs in disbelief. "And it honestly didn't matter what we said. I'm sitting there going, 'No,' and they're literally rolling their eyes and going, 'Oh, come on.' That's the thing with being associated with Manson—people will pretty much believe anything."

Not yet 20, Wood has been on a tear since the controversial hit *Thirteen*, having since starred in *Pretty Persuasion* and *Running With Scissors*. She'll play the female lead in the forthcoming *King of California* (alongside Michael Douglas) and the younger version of Uma Thurman in *In Bloom*. Currently, she can be seen in *Across the Universe*, Julie Taymor's surreal live-action//animation project based on 35 Beatles songs (including the titular tune).

Although the story is simply inspired by the music, the film presents a challenge in that Beatles songs are such sacred cows. The trailer for *Across the Universe* is promising, showing a Gilliam/Gondry-esque fantasy world that has flickers of *Yellow Submarine* sensibility and appears to use the songs tastefully, without falling into lame music video literalism. Wood's approach to acting ostensibly helped her play peacenik Lucy (as in, "in the sky with diamonds"), whose brother is drafted into Vietnam.

"I just try to listen," she says. "You just put yourself in that situation and work with everything around you. It's different for everybody, but I just try not to think about it too much, and just do it. No fear! And, hopefully, by doing that well enough something that I will do will eventually... inspire that one person who can't sleep."

WES ORSHOSKI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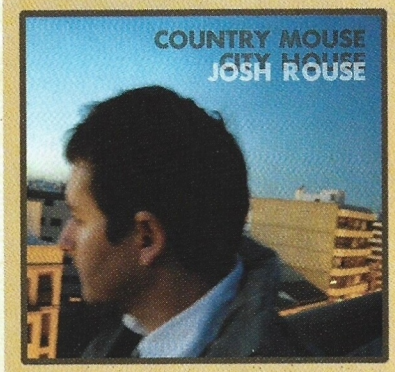

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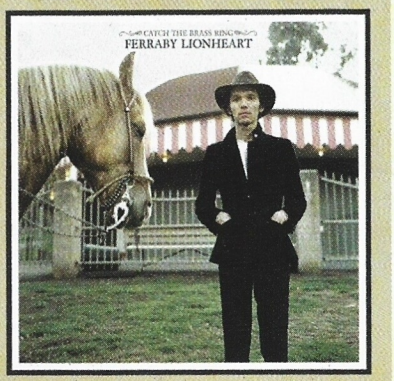

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Anything Boys Can Do...

Girl power rules in rock doc *Girls Rock!*

IN 2004, FILMMAKER Arne Johnson saw Sleater-Kinney's Carrie Brownstein speak about her recent teaching stint at Portland's Rock 'n' Roll Camp for Girls. "It just gave me goosebumps," he says. "She was like, 'I've seen the most wild, insane, experimental music you can possibly imagine this last week, and it was all done by eight- and nine-year-old girls,' and she talked about how inspiring it was. I immediately knew there was something there."

Johnson called longtime friend and fellow filmmaker, Shane King, and the two made *Girls Rock!*, a documentary about the camp that had its U.S. debut at this year's Seattle International Film Festival, and is scheduled for theatrical release in early 2008.

The camp was founded in 2000 as a one-time event, but its popularity has led the organization to offer programs year-round. At the five-day summer camp, girls from 8 to 18 form a band, write songs and perform at a final concert. Both Johnson and King had grown up in Portland and knew some of the organizers and teachers (who have included Brownstein, Corin Tucker, Sarah Dougher and the Gossip's Beth Ditto). "Even though it's all rock 'n' roll and everybody's shredding," says Johnson, "there's something about the manner of the camp that was something we both loved, which was the way politics and gender and feminism were navigated in a community-bonding manner. We felt like there could be a good lesson there."

The first step was winning over the camp organizers. "They had turned down several people because they were not interested in making it famous," says Johnson. "The camp is always foisting people off who want to make it famous or make it into an MTV thing." Johnson and King themselves wanted to avoid the documentary-about-a-competition genre, exemplified by films like *Spellbound* and *Mad Hot Ballroom*, "which are all really wonderful movies," says Johnson, "but they end up going down the same wormhole."

The film focuses on four girls: death metal-loving Laura; Misty, who's never even seen a bass guitar; pint-sized Palace, who can shriek like a banshee; noise-music fan Amelia, with a cache of songs about her dog, Pippi. But it's ultimately about the empowerment the campers receive, something the filmmakers regarded as especially important, considering the issues that came up during interviews with the girls. "They were all talking about stuff they should not have to be talking about—dieting and harassment and feeling like they couldn't be in bands," says Johnson. "Hearing about those kind of feelings was really moving and ultimately pretty shattering. And it really changed the direction of the film." GILLIAN G. GAAR

DREAM TEAM

Ethan Hawke and Jesse Harris team up on *The Hottest State.*

IN THE FILM VERSION of the novel that he penned ten years ago, *The Hottest State*, screenwriter/director Ethan Hawke tells a coming-of-age tale of first love between two artists (William the actor; Sarah the singer/songwriter) and three states. Actually four states, one being the emotional state one finds oneself in when love, sex, desire, jealousy and all those things first come calling. The other states are New York, Texas and Connecticut. There's Mexico too. (Is that a state?) Anyway, Hawke paints a convincing portrait of obsessive passion with beautiful language and elegant tone; a lingo and mood modified ably by songwriter/singer Jesse Harris, who not only acted in and scored *State*, but wrote all of its songs. Hawke and Harris—very much a team—got M. Ward, Cat Power, Bright Eyes, Feist, Norah Jones, Willie Nelson and more to sing these songs on its soundtrack.

Did you find it hard to adapt your original work to this medium, calculating its nuances so to play to film?

EH: I felt like I was adapting someone else's novel. I'd written it so long ago—10 years—that I felt a disconnect emotionally. Maybe that's why it was easy to share it, to bring in collaborators like Jesse. There's something lonely about writing. Having to share it makes it more appealing.

So why each other?

EH: I'd been daydreaming about making this movie, thinking which musical ideas'd go great where. But remember, the female protagonist is a songwriter, and she had at least four performance pieces. So I needed songs for this character to sing. I couldn't drag those out of the novel. As a fan of Jesse's I knew he was a great songwriter. Then I [thought] it might be fun for him to be in the movie, then to score it. But I didn't want it to have all one voice... So we scored the movie with his songs. The music was original, with one author, and it'd become a Greek chorus of sorts.

So how were these songs chosen?

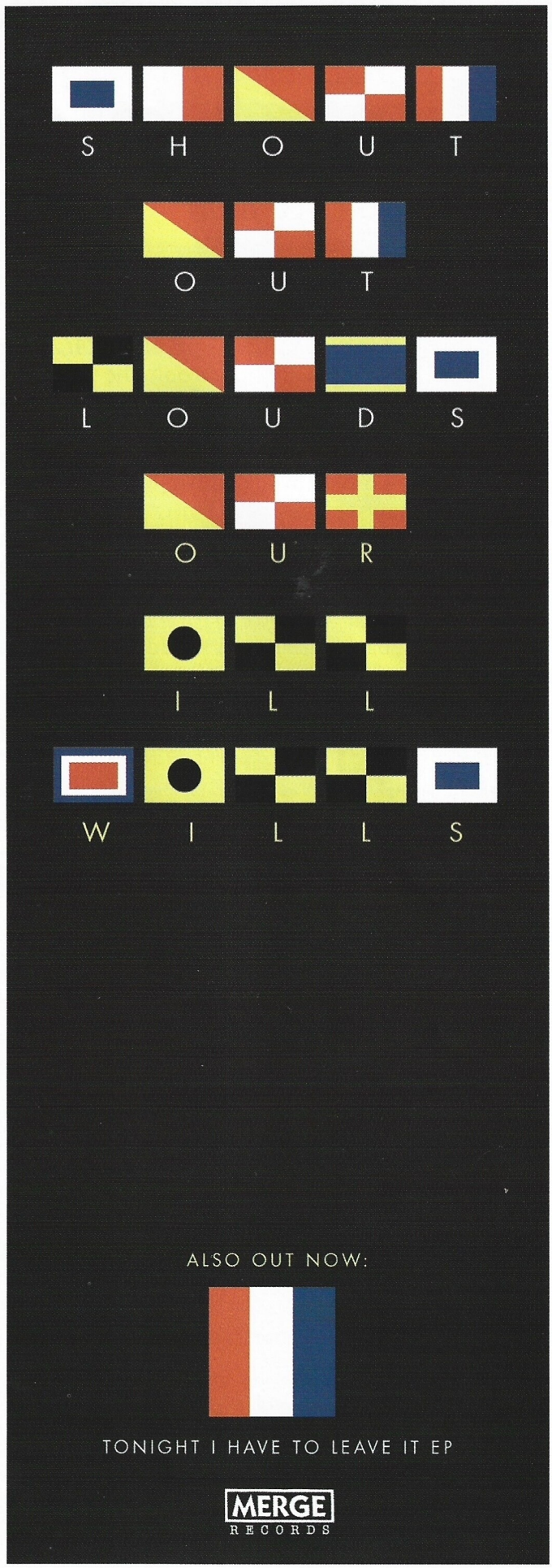
JH: The first thing I did was give Ethan every album I did and song I wrote. Then we started matching those songs to who we dreamed might do them. And when we went to them a few artists had their own desires. Norah Jones, Conor Oberst and Feist all knew songs they wanted to sing. The rest came from Ethan saying, "Wouldn't Cat Power sound amazing singing 'It's Alright to Fail?' or Emmylou Harris 'Speed of Sound'?"

Was there a criterion as to what you were looking for? A certain nuance, tempo?

JH: Heartbreak.

EH: All the way. We sat at my kitchen table and went over the whole script and mapped out the tempo changes we needed. Like when the characters had their first breakup and the hero has to win the girl back, I knew we needed a testosterone-driven tune; something with power. And Jesse had four or five tracks we like. But settled for one we loved. Then had to decide who could rock it out. I'd been listening to a lot of Black Keys. They're certainly testosterone filled. Perfect for the hit we needed.

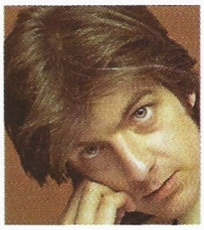
A.D. AMOROSI



Nick Lowe

58, BRENTFORD, LONDON

BY RANDY HARWARD



Singer-songwriter-producer Nick Lowe has influenced generations past (and those to come) with his pure pop, smoky torch songs, wry country and, on his newly minted 13th album *At My Age* (Yep Roc), all of the above. Sitting in a New York City hotel room, he's aware of his accomplishments, but appraises them accordingly, with the grounded, well-rounded worldview he's honed over years of writing about the condition of characters we know all too well.

Characters. Lowe swears it's all about characters, fake people based on real ones—often Lowe himself, whose purpose is to hold our flaws and fortes in front of our faces so that we may see how we're living or holding up. "I know what it's like to feel blue or happy or pissed off and all shades in between," says the English gentleman. "So from that point of view, I know what I'm singing about. But I just make it up. Any opinion represented in this song is not necessarily that of the author, and any reference to anyone living or dead is purely coincidental."

Coincidence or no, Lowe's stories of randy playboys, lovelorn schlubs, resolute men and equivocating bastards show a wisdom hard-earned, uncommonly keen, and well-deserving of the adjectives "hip" and "messianic."

A British journalist described me as the "Jesus of Cool." It was such a ludicrous thing to say that we thought, "Fantastic. *I* haven't described myself thus, so why not?" So we used it. The American record label, Columbia, thought it was *far* too racy and made me change it.

I quite like it, getting old. I don't really like taking time to get going in the mornings, you know, a bit creaky getting out of bed. I used to get steamed all the time when I was younger, and I just don't anymore. [Aging] isn't all that horrible. Horny? I don't know. Sometimes not.

I joined a band when I was a teenager, when I *was* horny, with the express intention of having lots of sex. After a while, it does sort of pale.

Choosing a band of highly strung individuals [for another supergroup such as Rockpile] would be my idea of hell, actually. I think I've sort of had it, being in a band. I used to really enjoy it but I don't think I'm a team player, enough, now.

The music business is teetering on the brink of collapse because the powers that be, through their own greed and stupidity, just perpetuate the same...old...*shite*. If you switch on MTV, you see the same stream of *dreary* rock groups. They all look like sacks of spuds. These pathetic rappers, one after the other, with their same *tired* shtick. That's why it's on the verge of cuts. That is *always* good fun to watch; I *thoroughly* enjoy that.

In the '70s, when the punk rock thing started in London, for six lovely, glorious months, the monkeys really did run the zoo. And a lot of these big record company blokes suddenly lost their jobs because they didn't understand and they couldn't keep up. It was fun to watch their heads roll. But this time, they've done it to themselves.

I just do my little sad thing and put it across with as much truth and sincerity as I can muster. At least that way, I won't sound like everybody else.

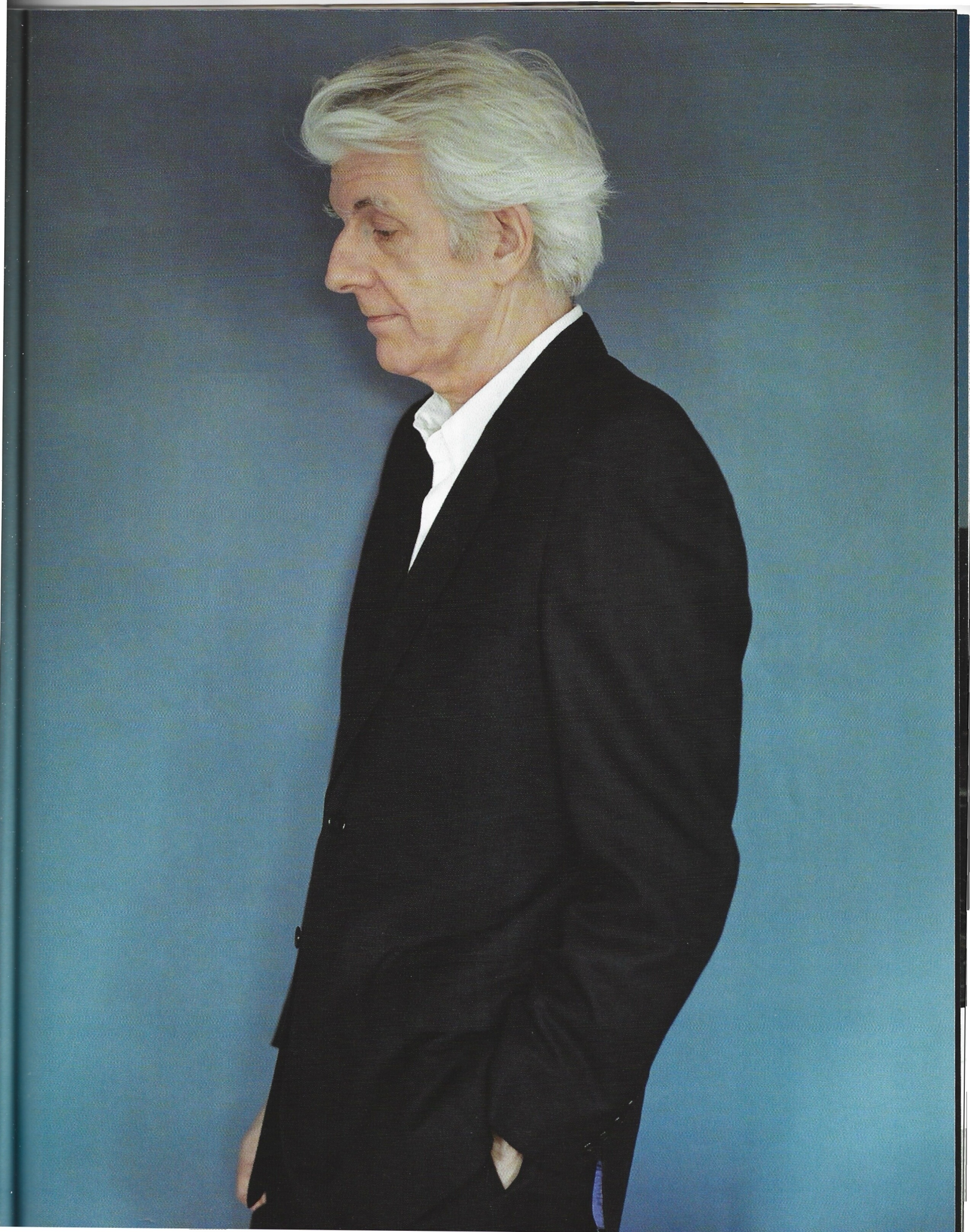
I really did think it was all over when punk rock came and we were all sort of just dancing around the corpse, giving it a final kick, and we'd all be back in regular jobs by the end of the week. But *no*. It's gone thundering on. In fact, I've had rather a good career since then. But I really did think it was all going to be over.

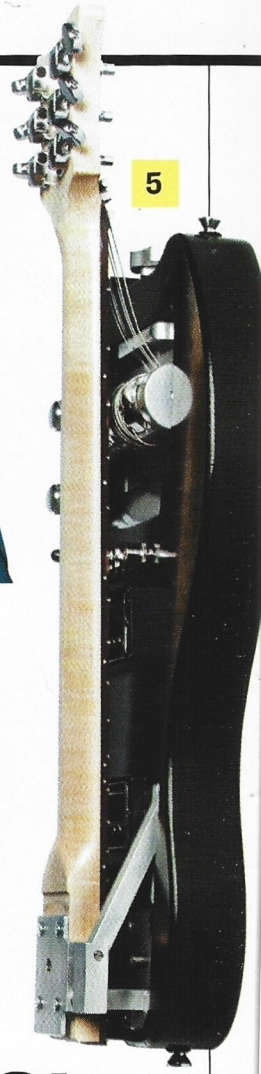
When I started out in the business, it was much dirtier. It was full of crooks and sharks, but in a way, those crooks and sharks had one thing going for them. They'd say, "Hey kid—sign here. Let me look after you, because you're different." Whereas now, it all seems to be, "Hey kid—sign here. You're the same."

I've done a few good records in my time. I bloody well should have; I've been at it long enough.

I have heard the most hair-raising stories of things that I'm supposed to have done, and I'm *damn* sure I wasn't there. But I won't deny them because they make me look pretty good.

[Songwriting is] like hearing a radio tuned to a really cool station in the apartment next door. You can hear it, but not very clearly. Every so often, it plays this really great song, and you stop and try to hear it through the wall. Each time it comes on, you hear a little bit more until finally you pick up the guitar and you play the thing. The trick is not to interfere with it, to wait until you've "heard" the entire song in these little bits and pieces. That is what makes a really good songwriter: they're the people that can listen to the song and not interfere until it's revealed itself.





FOLDING GUITARS? STEALTH TASERS? KINKY TIMEPIECES? HARP GONNA "SAKE" TO YA!

BY AARON BURGESS

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John Lyons' preferred medium is wood, but his output—custom amps, pedals and enclosures—is all rock. Tweed, oak, pine, even snakeskin—send him your specs and your wish for an outer covering, and Lyons can build a pedal that doesn't only look stunning; it may just outperform any factory-issue pedal as well. (See his site's sound clips for evidence.) (Prices vary; mrdwab.com/john)

2. THREADLESS "SUGAR HIGH" T-SHIRT BY JUSTIN WHITE

How will *you* feel after your 10th bowl of Frosted Flakes? While the "Sugar High" tee—exclusive to Threadless via 21-year-old designer Justin White—comes in a kids' version, we grown-ups are more likely to dig the Saturday-breakfast nightmare scenario of the design. ($15-$17; threadless.com/product/834/Sugar_High)

3. NIXON "THE KINKY" WOMEN'S WATCH

A higher-fashion take on the wide-band rocker watch, the Kinky (shown here in currant/tan) combines retro-analog numbers and rugged imported leather with playful modern touches like striped cutouts and a stainless-steel push-button enclosure. The result is a conversation piece that's as functional as it is, well, kinky. ($100-$130; nixonnow.com)

4. SAKÉONE G JOY SAKÉ

Crafted for purist palates and exploding with a surprisingly complex array of flavors, SakéOne's G Joy holds to Japanese tradition while being fit for world travel. Pair it with sushi, sure, but G Joy also makes a perfect complement to rich, earthy flavors (grilled lamb, stinky cheese) and the spiciest Caribbean or South American cuisine you can throw at it. ($20; sakeone.com)

5. DEVILLAIN CENTERFOLD FOLDING GUITAR

Will it stay in tune when folded? Will the aluminum bolt kill your sustain? Will it outperform the portable Steinberger you dropped two grand for on eBay? At nearly twice that, the hand-crafted DeVillain Centerfold (designed by airline pilot/guitarist Fredrik Johansson) has a lot to live up to, but don't think Johansson and his team of artisans aren't working overtime to halt criticism at the pass. (Seriously, read their FAQ.) ($3,370; devillain.com)

6. DON'T TOUCH ME! LOVELY PINK SEAL STUN GUN LOVELY TASER WEAPON

Sometimes, badly translated Japanese says more than a reviewer's blurb ever could: "Who imagines this lovely seal is a stun gun? It gives an electric shock to a naughty guy trying to touch you." And, perhaps more importantly: "Don't use it to a person who has a heart disease. Don't put it on the delicate part of body." ($14.17; strapya-world.com)

7. ROTTER AND FRIENDS T-SHIRTS

Jessica Rotter and Alison Zero pay the rent by promoting new music, but after hours, the moonlighting NYC publicists retreat into nostalgia with a line of tees whose whimsical, hand-drawn figures evoke the Summer of Love as much as they do our favorite old records (bonus awesome points for their LP-style packaging). Besides introducing some curious new characters, Rotter and Friends' fall/winter collection includes a tribute to Neil Young's On The Beach. ($37; rotterandfriends.com)

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The Turning Point

On his new album, Iron & Wine's Sam Beam redefines both his sound and his career.

BY JOHN SCHACHT PHOTOS BY STEVEN DEWALL

For a guy with four kids and a set of fruitful collaborations in his recent past, Iron & Wine's Sam Beam still seems genuinely surprised to learn that he works well with others.

That's understandable, because it's easy to still see Beam as that solitary figure whose decade-long bedroom-studio residency produced 2002's *The Creek Drank the Cradle*, an assured debut that could have been recorded on a wax cylinder and issued on Folkways instead of Sub Pop. With his barely-above-a-whisper vocals, trellised arrangements, and poet's sense of intimacy, Beam seemed the epitome of a solo artist.

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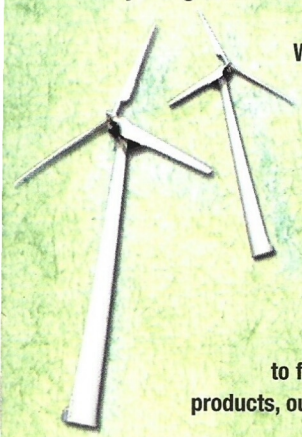

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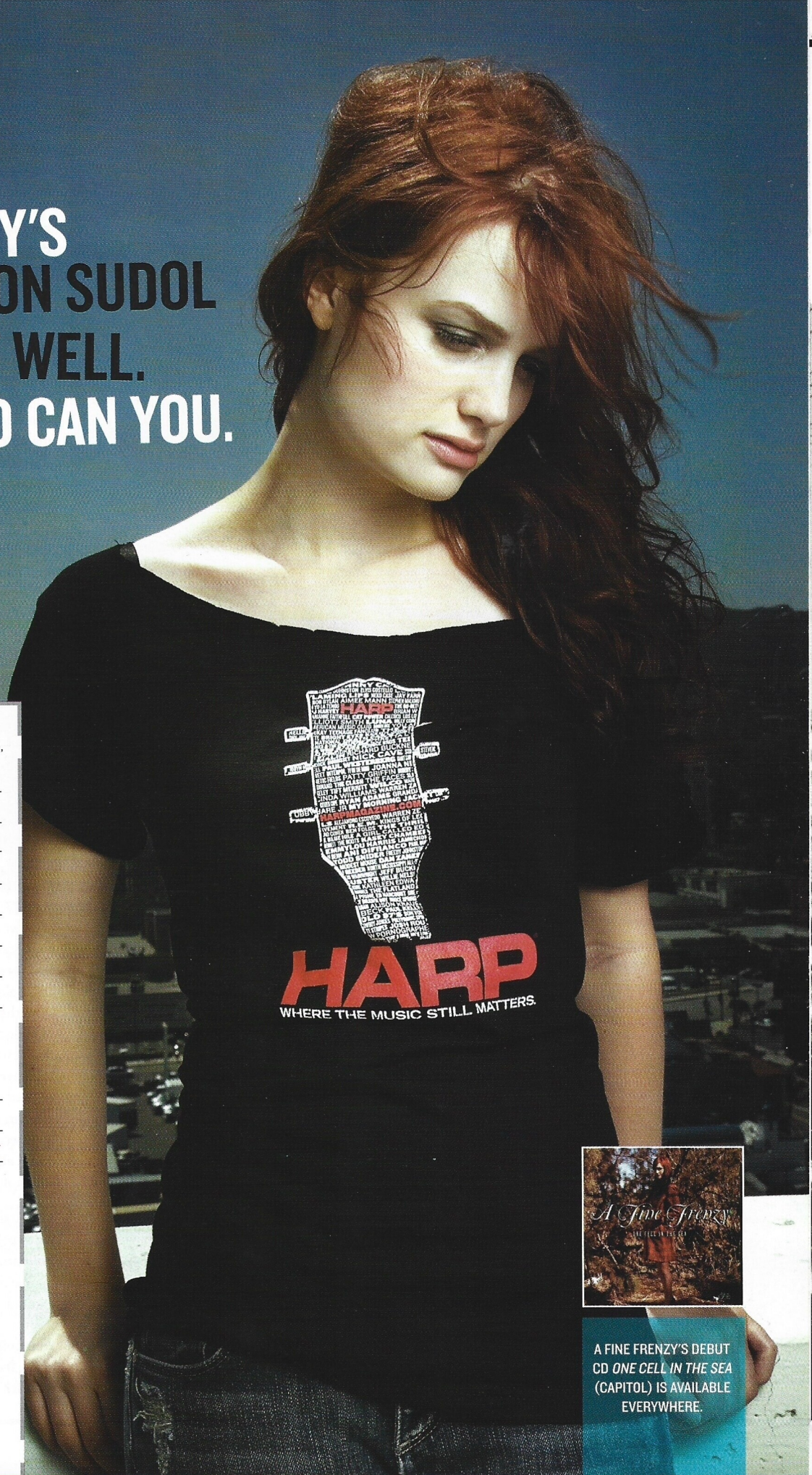
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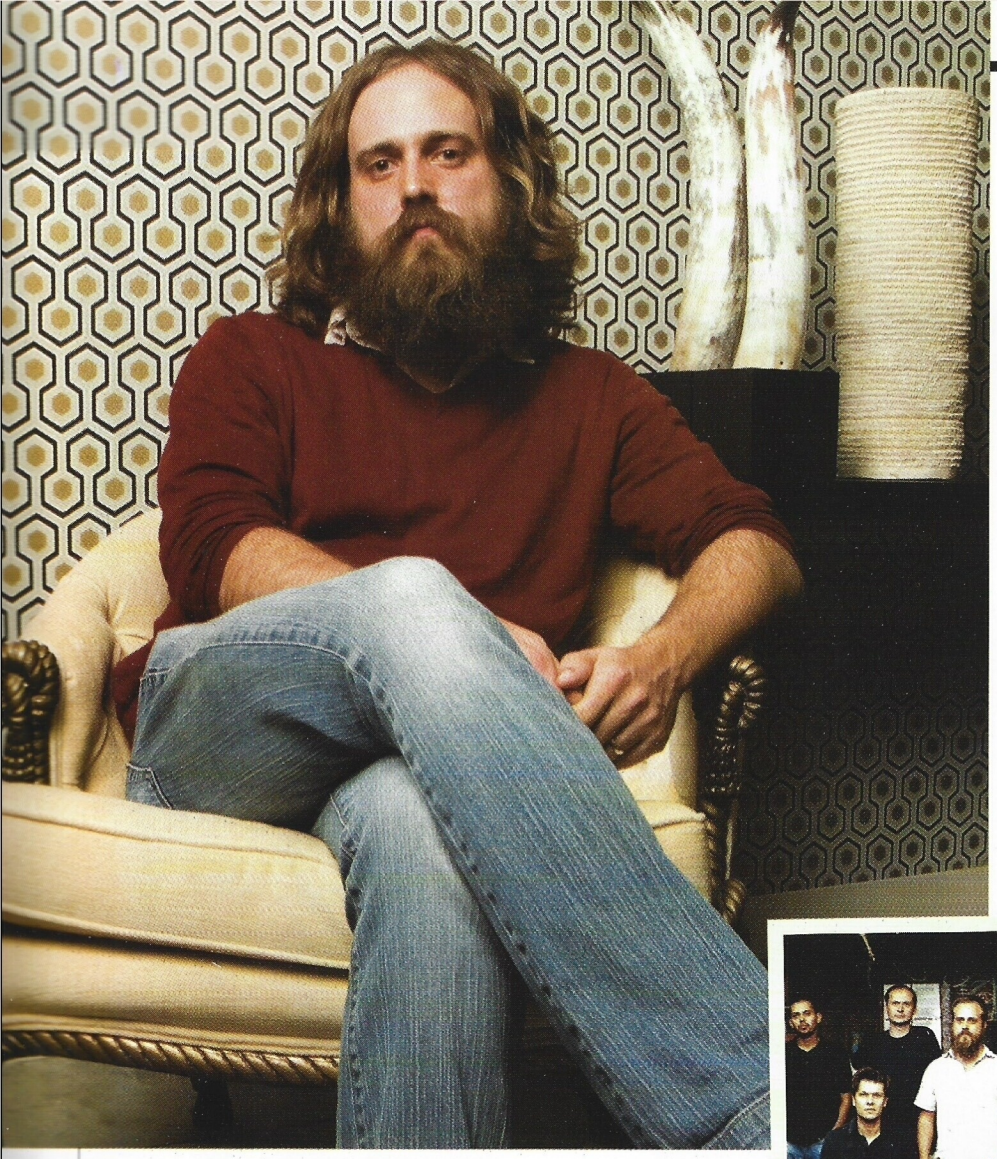


Sam Beam (center) with Calexico

Beam, now 33, upgraded to a professional studio and added a bare-bones band for 2004's *Our Endless Numbered Days*. But with the record's sparse arrangements and his singular voice, the songs remained resolutely solo-like, if crisper-sounding.

The *Woman King* EP that followed in 2005 offered the first hint that Beam was ready to move beyond the sonic constraints of his *Anthology of Folk* vignettes, mostly through added percussion. Then came the collaboration with desert-baked border-hoppers Calexico, a pairing organized by Overcoat Records' Howard Greynolds and captured brilliantly on *In the Reins*. Still, for all we mere mortals knew, it could have been a one-off whim, with Beam returning to home studio recording between diaper changes.

The Shepherd's Dog should shut the door on all that. Where previous Iron & Wine records were typically recorded in two weeks, this one fanned out over half a year—in part because it took so much schedule-juggling to lasso its loaded roster: Joey Burns and Paul Niehaus from Calexico, Califone's Jim Becker, Tin Hat Trio's Rob Burger and Isotope 217's Matt Lux, among others.

Beam's boss at Sub Pop, Jonathan Poneman, says *The Shepherd's Dog* is Iron & Wine's *Swordfishtrombones*, the record that redefined Tom Waits' sound and career. There are no carnival themes or Brechtian nightmarescapes here, and you'd be hard-pressed to find two more different voices, but Poneman's point stands. Beam's folky narratives, visceral imagery and Biblical Flannery O'Connor allegories still inform the songs, but they've transitioned to a host of new audio surroundings: African highlife rhythms, bossa nova, funk, Middle East exotica, desert noir, and even some electronic glitch-and-switch, courtesy of long-time producer and studio whiz Brian Deck.

It's true—*The Shepherd's Dog* sounds like a turning point.

We caught up with Beam at his home in the hill country outside of Austin, Texas, where he moved two years ago from Miami. Fittingly, he'd spent part of the day in his home studio collaborating—this time with Deck and Califone's Tim Rutili, which could cause arrhythmia in fans of both. (Beam cautions it's too early to tell if anything will come of it.) Soft-spoken and unfailingly polite, Beam discussed the "aggressive" nature of his new songs, what he's learned from other musicians, and his writing process.

The Shepherd's Dog really expands your sound; how much of that was a conscious decision, and how much of it just developed naturally?

I didn't think the development on this record would end up being so drastic, but when it was going that way I didn't stop. These are types of music that I've always enjoyed and felt like I was working towards, but if you write a song like "Naked As They Came" (off *Our Endless Numbered Days*), it doesn't really make sense to put all that stuff on it. A lot of the older songs were trying to find a certain amount of peace with whatever situation they were talking about. But with these songs that wasn't necessarily the case, so it lent itself to playing more aggressively. I also knew I wanted to try a bunch of other instruments that I hadn't tried before and have a wider sonic palette. We looked back on the record and went, "Wow, there's a lot of different stuff here: a waltz, a bossa nova, dub stuff, folk." It was fun to be able to find a way to incorporate all this stuff you like into something that hopefully doesn't sound like a Putumayo record.

There's a stretch of three or four songs that has a real "suite" feel—was that intentional?

These songs are kind of older songs, which is always the case with me because I have this backlog of material. So I've been sitting on these songs for a while and I already knew what sequence I wanted, something that would make sense in a variety of song types. Then we just struck on the idea that it would be fun to connect some of them together; not a rote thing, but just where it seemed right. I've always liked records where you can sit and listen to it as a whole piece. Not necessarily where it's written like a musical and it all has some schematic through-line, but where it feels all connected in a certain way.

As you expand the instrumentation, can we expect an _Iron & Wine & the London Philharmonic_ somewhere down the road?

We'll see [*laughs*]. It's not on my books. But I wouldn't count anything out.

Your collaboration with Calexico seemed really fruitful in every way. What did you learn from it?

It taught me a lot, playing with those guys. I don't read music, and I've always had a certain insecurity about my playing, and though playing with them didn't necessarily help that [*laughs*] it definitely gave me a sense of fearlessness, which was really healthy. They taught me a lot about trusting other musicians. I wasn't a control freak, but I didn't have a lot of experience collaborating with other musicians. It wasn't that I didn't want to, I just didn't know how.

You've expressed ambivalence about touring; has that changed any?

I didn't tour at all until the first record came out. It broadens your mind—if you don't mind having your mind broadened in the backroom of a bar. It's not a very natural setting for me. When I started, I thought it was something I always wanted to do, at least the travel aspect of it, which was really attractive to me. But I've learned since that I'm much more of a homebody than I thought I was. I've learned how to play in front of people and enjoy it, but it's not a very natural thing. I tend to associate it with film, and I'm much more of a behind-the-camera person than an in front-of-the-camera person. I just enjoy writing and recording so much more. It's a lot like painting: You work so long on a painting and you don't want to paint it over and over again.

"I'VE LEARNED SINCE THAT I'M MUCH MORE OF A HOMEBODY THAN I THOUGHT I WAS."

In the past you've dug into your Southern background and Christianity for song fodder, but "Innocent Bones" struck me as the most straightforward song you've written contrasting piety and hypocrisy. Did you mean to get that specific?

If you write a line criticizing Pentecostal Christians you can't really say it wasn't intentional. I mean, rich Christians—it's kind of an oxymoron, isn't it? At the same time I don't really mean it as a propaganda thing, it just started out with the Cain and Abel stuff contrasting lifestyles and choices. Part of their ancestry as Christians is whatever's going on now, and so part of it did get specific. I didn't feel like I had as tight a rein on a lot of these songs, but I think for me it was a good thing. Not to say I didn't do a lot of revisions, but I kind of left these a bit more ambiguous than the older songs.

Have you found that you have a favorite mode of procrastination when writing?

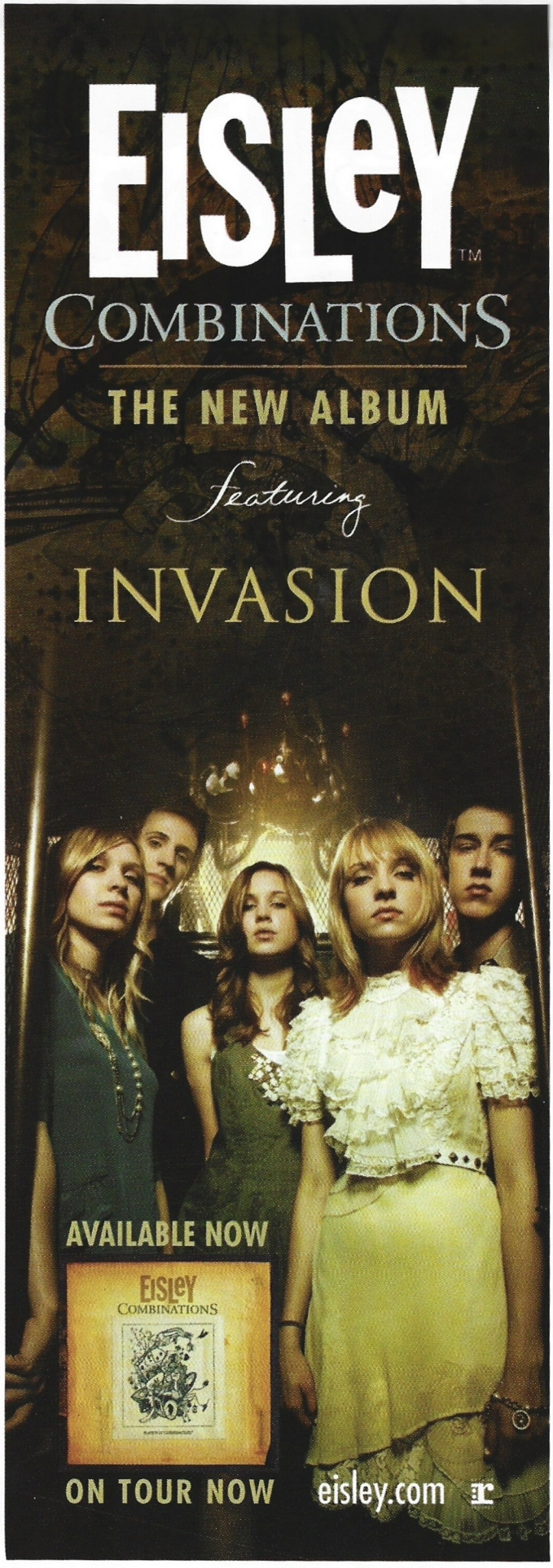
Oh, that's so easy, isn't it? There are lots of those. My thing is that I've got so many kids now I have to really fight and scrape out time to work, because there's *always* something going on. You definitely have to say, "This is my time and I have to make it worthwhile."

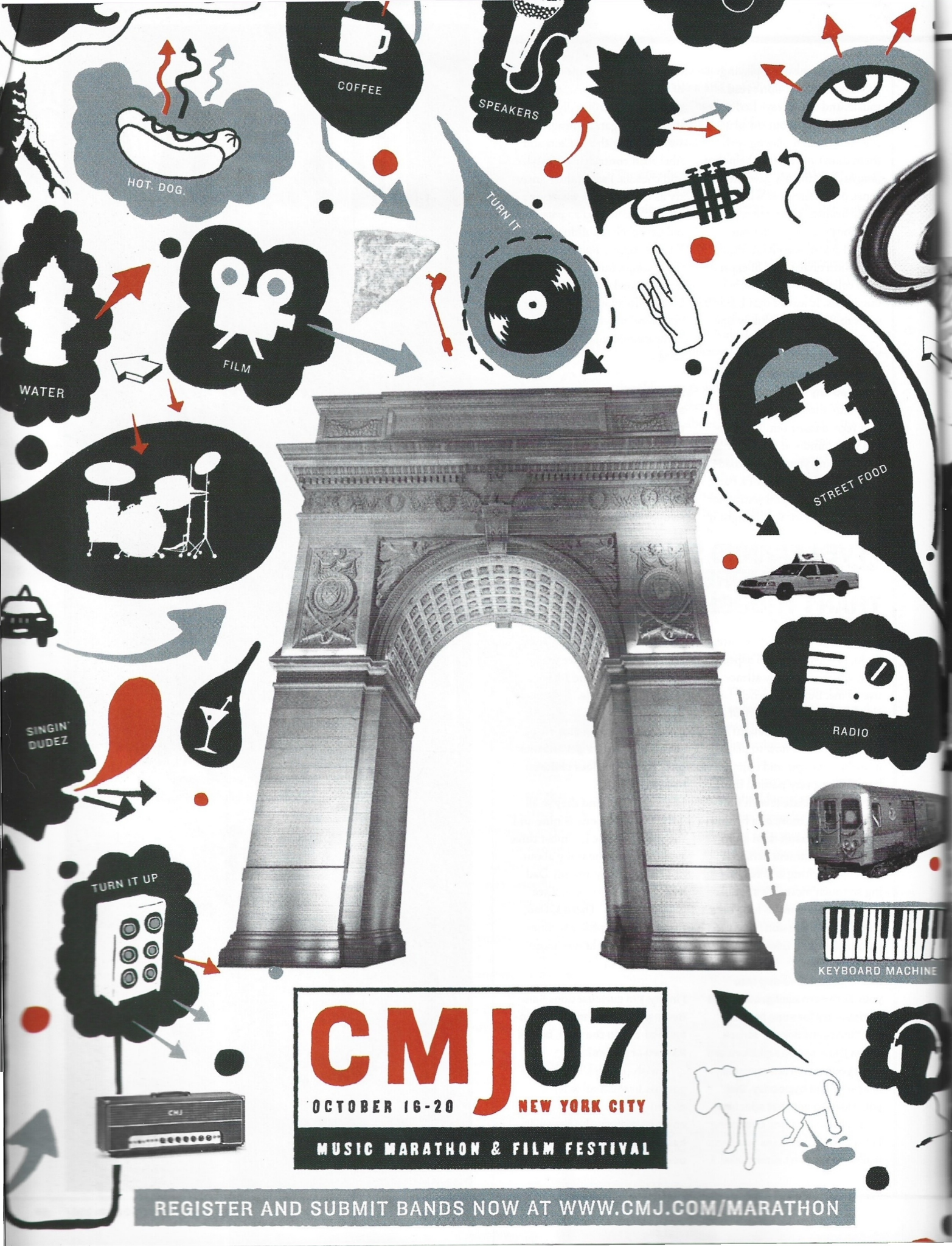
Every time I read a story it seems like you've got another one. You've got four children now, right?

Four, right, and they're all girls. The oldest one is nine and the youngest one is almost three months. I was moaning about not having a boy and my Dad said, "Don't worry, you'll see plenty of boys!" Thanks, Dad, that's really helpful. My nine-year-old already knows more than I did at 14 or 15.

Finally, I'm curious: does Sam Beam get any wannabe groupies? Panties in the mail, boobs flashed at shows?

I wish [*laughs*]. Maybe they got lost in the mail when I moved. Like I said, I kind of enjoy my time at the house. It hasn't happened yet, but if it does, I'll let you know. **H**

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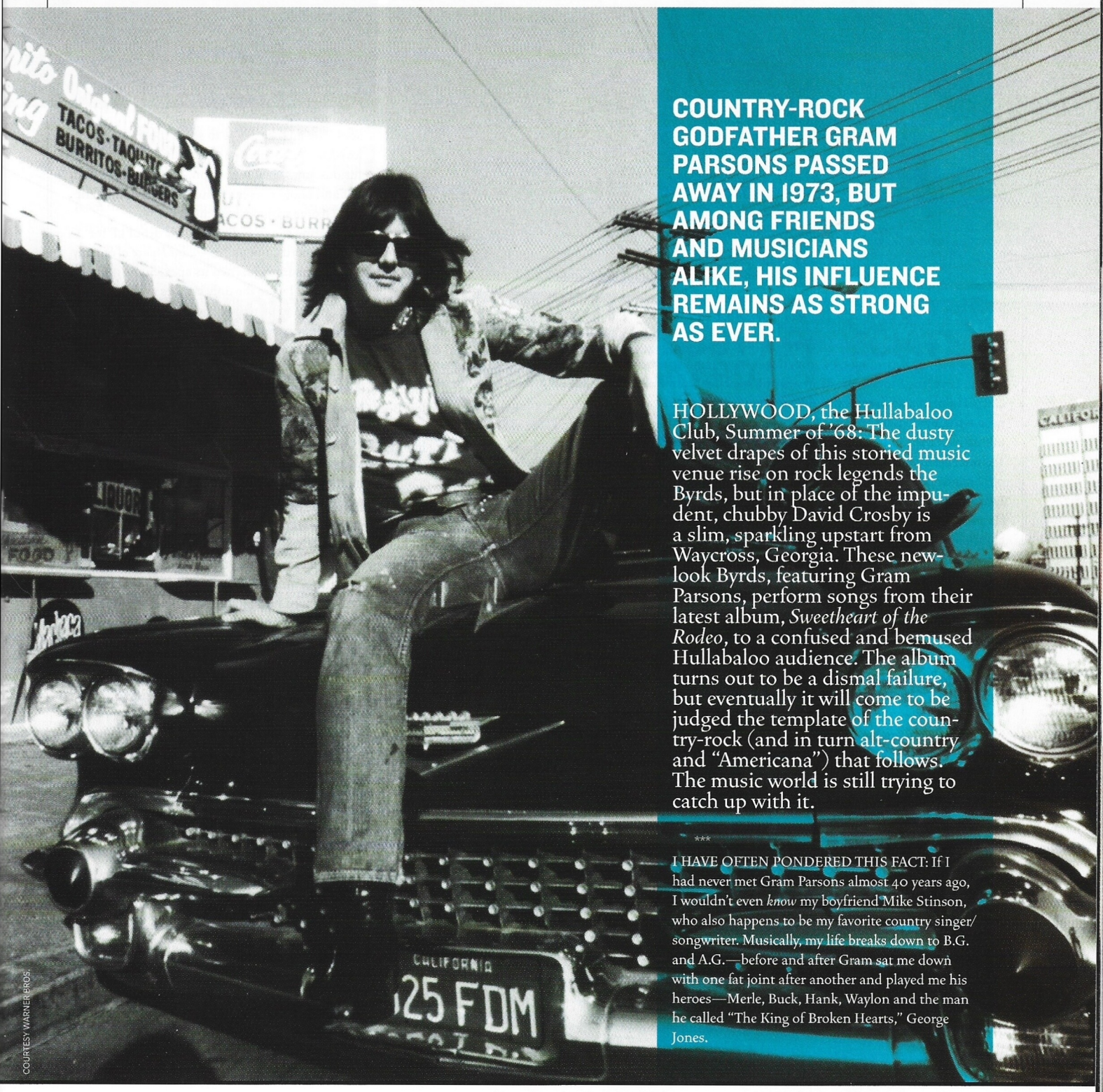
BY PAMELA DES BARRES



COURTESY WARNER BROS.

COUNTRY-ROCK GODFATHER GRAM PARSONS PASSED AWAY IN 1973, BUT AMONG FRIENDS AND MUSICIANS ALIKE, HIS INFLUENCE REMAINS AS STRONG AS EVER.

HOLLYWOOD, the Hullabaloo Club, Summer of '68: The dusty velvet drapes of this storied music venue rise on rock legends the Byrds, but in place of the impudent, chubby David Crosby is a slim, sparkling upstart from Waycross, Georgia. These new-look Byrds, featuring Gram Parsons, perform songs from their latest album, *Sweetheart of the Rodeo*, to a confused and bemused Hullabaloo audience. The album turns out to be a dismal failure, but eventually it will come to be judged the template of the country-rock (and in turn alt-country and "Americana") that follows. The music world is still trying to catch up with it.

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I HAVE OFTEN PONDERED THIS FACT: If I had never met Gram Parsons almost 40 years ago, I wouldn't even *know* my boyfriend Mike Stinson, who also happens to be my favorite country singer/songwriter. Musically, my life breaks down to B.G. and A.G.—before and after Gram sat me down with one fat joint after another and played me his heroes—Merle, Buck, Hank, Waylon and the man he called "The King of Broken Hearts," George Jones.

Flying Burrito Brothers (L-R): Chris Ethridge, Gram Parsons, Chris Hillman, "Sneeky" Pete Kleinow, Michael Clarke

A&M ARCHIVES

The author w/shirt she sewed for Gram Parsons

I didn't even *consider* country music. To my rocked-out teenage ears, it was Hee-haw yee-haw; corny, old-fashioned yodeling by square-jawed squares with unbecoming crew-cuts. I was busy keeping time with the Doors, Love, the Stones, the Mothers of Invention and the Byrds (whose Chris Hillman also deserves credit for expanding my musical consciousness—the Byrds were the first rock boys I met in Hollywood after hitchhiking over the hill from the sepia-toned San Fernando Valley to the Technicolor Sunset Strip).

I remember vividly my first glimpse of Gram. It was the night the Beatles' *Yellow Submarine* premiered in Hollywood. My all-girl group the GTO's (Frank Zappa's protégées, Girls Together Outrageously) was invited and we hand-painted Miss Sparky's bulbous Hudson Hornet bright yellow, complete with faux portholes. Just before the lights went down I spotted this striking young man decked out in a blood-red Nudie suit covered in rhinestone submarines, gliding down the aisle. I pointed him out to Miss Mercy and we stood, entranced. It was obvious there was a very important newcomer in town.

A few months after the Hullabaloo Club show there was yet another version of the Byrds, and I was no longer interested. Chris Hillman and Gram had started an out-and-out long-haired country band called Flying Burrito Brothers and were playing gigs all over Los Angeles with Chris Ethridge, from Mississippi, on bass, ex-Byrds Mike Clarke on drums and the transformative Sneeky Pete Kleinow on pedal steel. I had reached the ripe and merry age of 19 and had become somewhat of a local celebrity—"Miss Pamela"—myself. I'd apparently caught the eye of Mr. Hillman, and the curious and ever-accepting Mr. Parsons had also taken a shine to Miss Mercy and Miss Pamela. He started taking us out for soul food on Venice Beach in his snazzy white T-Bird, and putting our names on the list for club dates. Sometimes Mercy and I were the only two people on the dance floor, yet even on the bleakest nights, the lack of audience didn't seem to faze Gram, who believed he was as important as Bob Dylan in his own special way.

The evening all honky-tonk hell broke loose in my heart, Gram had invited Mercy and me over to the rustic Reseda pad on De Soto Avenue he shared with Chris. As we walked up a driveway lined with wooden wagon wheels, the door opened, and there stood the cosmic cowboy, holding aloft a huge sack of marijuana.

That night I listened to Gram's stoned tutorial, and right there on De Soto Avenue the Godalmighty glory of country music was unleashed in my soul. The intense desire to share the music he loved, to make sure you *got it*, infused Gram with a furious, unassailable passion. The next day I went out and bought several albums by Waylon, Merle and George with my rent money.

During the recording of their debut LP for A&M Records, 1969's *The Gilded Palace of Sin*, my Burrito madness reached its apex. Some nights, Mercy and I were the only visitors at the studio and thrilled to be part of the chorus warbling off-key on "Little Hippie Boy." We lolled on the black leather couches, watching as Gram and Chris Ethridge worked out "Hot Burrito No. 1" and "No. 2," and marveled at the scene.

I was still hanging out with other bands at the time—the Jimi Hendrix Experience, the Jeff Beck Group, Alice Cooper—but I was all wrapped up in this edgy strum and twang, and a Burritos gig took precedence over all others. My favorite live musical experience of all time took place at one of their Whisky a Go Go shows in Hollywood. I was dolled up in my ersatz GTO's/cowgirl combo (sequined face and turquoise cowboy hat) and leaning on the stage when Gram launched into one of his Jones weepers, "She Once Lived Here." When he came to the bridge and sang, "I see her face in the cool of the evening/I hear her voice in each breeze loud and clear," he started crying. Nobody else seemed to notice but me, and as the tears trickled down Gram's face, I was transfixed, forever transformed.

In early '69, Chris and Gram moved into an upscale bachelor pad in woodsy Nichols Canyon, soon to be known as "Burrito Manor." One day Gram called and asked me to come meet Nancy Ross, the mother of his baby daughter, Polly. From my old diary:

January 17—It was a lovely meeting and Nancy related stories of her "Old Boy," Gram. So in love, she is. We adored each other. The guys snorted coke and were all high and lovely. Baby Polly and I got along so well that Nancy asked me to stay with her while she and Gram went to the Palomino. Chris asked me out on a date, to see Buck Owens and Waylon Jennings next Friday. How outrageous and simply amazing! He played a bunch of records for me while the Parsons family bathed. I told him to be careful out in the rain and he said, "Oh Miss Pamela, you woman, you." He even talked about me being a Burrito Sister and singing a couple of songs with them.

I finally had my night (several, actually) with Mr. Hillman. Sometimes he seemed crazy about me and other times I let him trample all over my heart, a karmic drama that continued to play out over decades. But at the moment, I was simply honored and overjoyed that Gram and Nancy trusted me with their precious little Polly. I eventually became her godmother, and am now the godmother of Gram's granddaughter, Harper Lee.

The GTO's were finishing up our album, *Permanent Damage*, when Chris and Gram arrived at the studio. Gram asked if he could play on a song but Zappa nixed the idea. I was mortified, but Gram was his usual graceful, genteel Southern self, and found an empty studio with a baby grand. He was having some romantic issues with Nancy and had just written the mourn-

LISA WARR

ful "Thousand Dollar Wedding" and another stunner, "Two Hearts Are Breaking," and he serenaded us for hours. Sitting at the piano, he looked down at his exquisitely long fingers and, stroking his slim wrists, shook his head and said, "I keep expecting to see stitches around my wrists. I don't know where these hands came from."

When the GTO's performed our first big event at the Shrine Auditorium with the Mothers, Alice Cooper and Wild Man Fischer, I was fussing around in my dressing room when Gram poked his head through the curtain. I couldn't believe that he and Chris had come to MY show! They kidnapped Mercy and me and the four of us circled the Shrine in Gram's T-Bird, smoking reefer after reefer. At the show Rodney Bingenheimer played Santa Claus, and I remember sitting on his lap and my Christmas wishes were to sleep with Mick Jagger and fly with the Burrito Brothers.

Not too long after that night, the Burritos played Topanga Canyon's funky little Corral Club. As usual, Mercy and I were the only ones on the floor. Suddenly the air in the tiny dump started stirring: the Rolling Stones had ambled in and were taking a table near the stage. Gram and Keith Richards were already pals, and Mick had previously met Mercy in San Francisco, so after a couple of songs Mick wandered out on the dance floor and asked her to introduce him to her "beautiful friend"—then he bowed and kissed my hand. When Gram saw what was going on he announced from the stage, "Be careful with Miss Pamela. She's a beauty, but she's tender-hearted."

I was moved to make my first embroidered cowboy shirt because of my crush on Chris Hillman—who, after all my midnight sewing sessions, promptly lost it in a poker game to Michael Clarke! I knew if I made a shirt for Gram he would be more appreciative, and I was right. From my diary:

JULY 15, 1969—When I gave it to him, he stood there with his mouth open. "I can't believe you made a shirt for me!" He put it on and went to the mirror and flipped out. He hugged and kissed me and showed it off to everyone. He said, "She doesn't do this for money, there's so much love in this shirt, I feel it. I feel royal; it's purple! This shirt will never be entered in any poker game!"

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NO MATTER WHAT ELSE WAS GOING on, I rarely missed a Burritos show. I was a devoted fan from beginning to end. I have a wide and varied taste in music, and as I said, much is due to Gram's insistence that I give country music a chance. Through the decades, I have latched onto musicians that move me and put me in that eternal cosmic groove. I know there are plenty of others that have been Burrito-influenced, but my favorites along the way have been Lone Justice, Whiskeytown, Wilco, the Old 97s, Lucinda Williams, Todd Snider and Mike Stinson.

Lone Justice/X guitarist Tony Gilkyson cites the Burritos as an early influence. "I think they had the most depth and brilliant understanding, and not just country, but bluegrass and soul music," says Tony. "It was perfectly natural for Gram to sing a soul song in a country/Western vein. I saw him in '68 at the Hullabaloo with the Byrds. I was a purist at the ripe age of 15, and was skeptical, but really came around. What they were doing was such a stretch. Most people don't understand country music. They think it's hokey. But everything in Gram's body language showed his genuine pride and love of the music. He had a real understanding of that impossible human longing—a failed relationship or a failed connection with divinity. I think that's an important distinction with him: he was attracted to songs that had that deep, tragic human longing for love or for God."

My goddaughter Polly Parsons has embraced Gram's legacy with the same kind of tenacity that lit up her father. Two years ago she gathered an impressive group of musicians to honor him in concert, including Norah Jones, Dwight Yoakam, Keith Richards and Lucinda Williams. Also on the bill was Jay Farrar, who calls the Burritos an "inspirational link. When I first heard them I thought they sounded like the Everly Brothers with a Dylanesque sensibility. It was a watershed moment to know someone else had been soaking up the same influences that I had. The lyrics on *Gilded Palace of Sin* left quite an impression. Another part of the mystique associated with them is the whole space cowboy element, which Sneeky Pete personified. As a result of the Burritos never reaching any mainstream success, it gave them more inspirational value. In a way, the Burrito Brothers laid out a template for me to follow, to go off and take my own spin in a different direction."

Chris Ethridge and I have remained friends for years. He was visiting from Mississippi recently and we reminisced about those Burrito days. Chris observed, "When you were around Gram, you had the feelin' he was gonna make it one way or another, remember? And Sneeky! He would really stretch it out there—he took country rock a step further, made it *cosmic* country rock.

"When we came in, country music, long hair and Nudie suits, I knew we were onto something, but didn't know it would have such an impact on other groups. We had the best time, even though when we played there weren't a lot of people there. Just you and Mercy! Yeah, Gram sure had a sincere *in his heart* love for country music. Everybody was listening to the Beatles and he was on a mission to make everybody appreciate George Jones and Merle Haggard."

"EVERYBODY WAS LISTENING TO THE BEATLES AND HE WAS ON A MISSION TO MAKE EVERYBODY APPRECIATE GEORGE JONES AND MERLE HAGGARD."

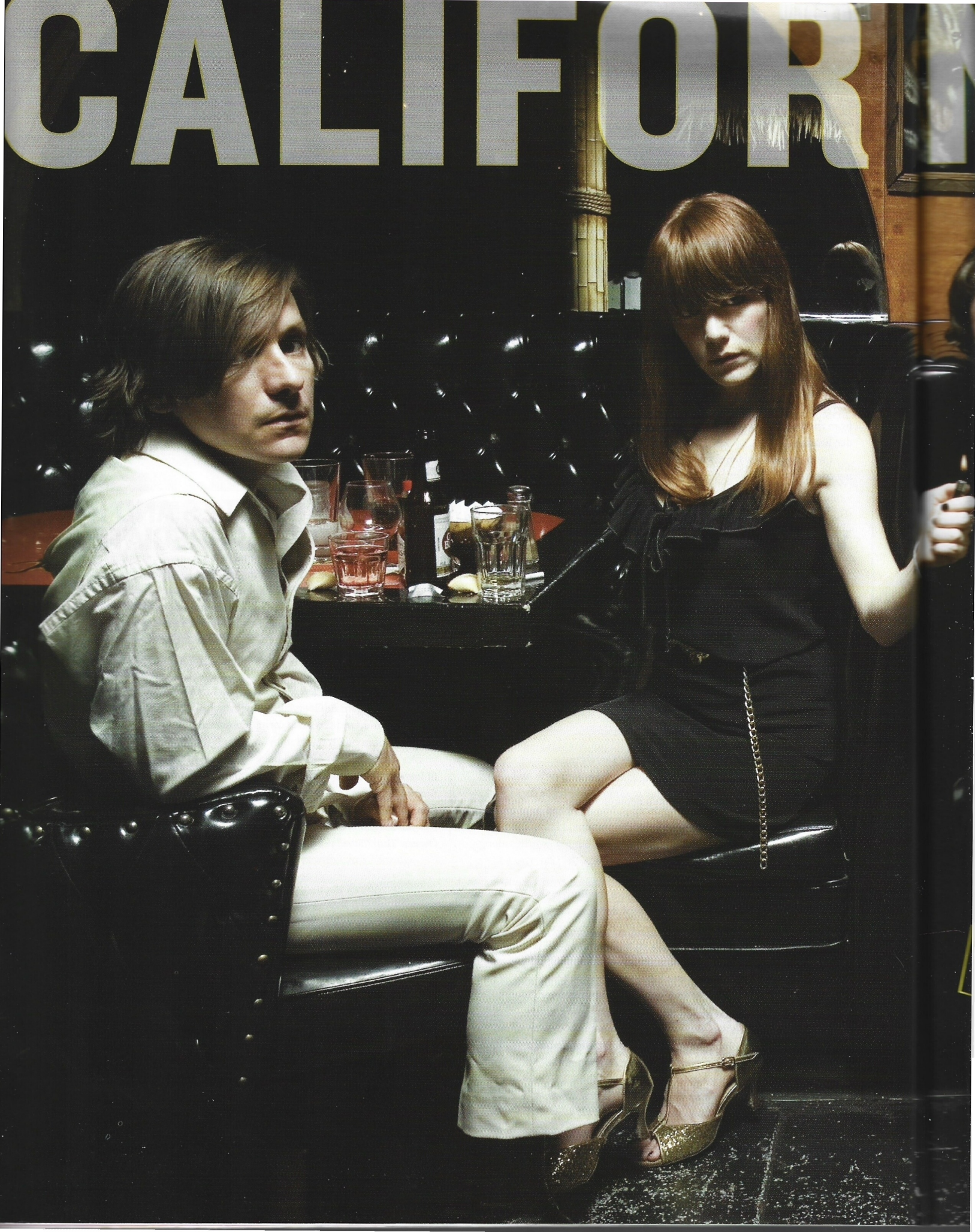
Chris paused, then laughed. "Gram will always be 26. He didn't get a chance to get ugly like me."

Sometimes when I'm out on the dance floor at one of Mike's shows, time seems to slow down and reverse. I'm back at the Palomino, the Whisky, the Corral Club, sequins all over my face, twirling and spinning to the magic music that still rings so loud and true. And when I'm sitting in the audience at a Merle Haggard or George Jones show, I glance heavenward and silently thank my old friend Gram for caring enough about my tender heart to share his great bounty with me. **H**

In late August, Amoeba Records released Gram Parsons Archives: The Flying Burrito Brothers Live at the Avalon, 1969, *a two-CD set of previously unreleased, pristine quality concert material—including ten never-before-heard Burritos songs and covers—originally recorded by Grateful Dead archivist Owsley "Bear" Stanley.*

Flying Burrito Brothers (L-R): Bernie Leadon, Gram Parsons, Michael Clarke, Chris Hillman, "Sneeky" Pete Kleinow

EVE BABBITZ A&M ARCHIVES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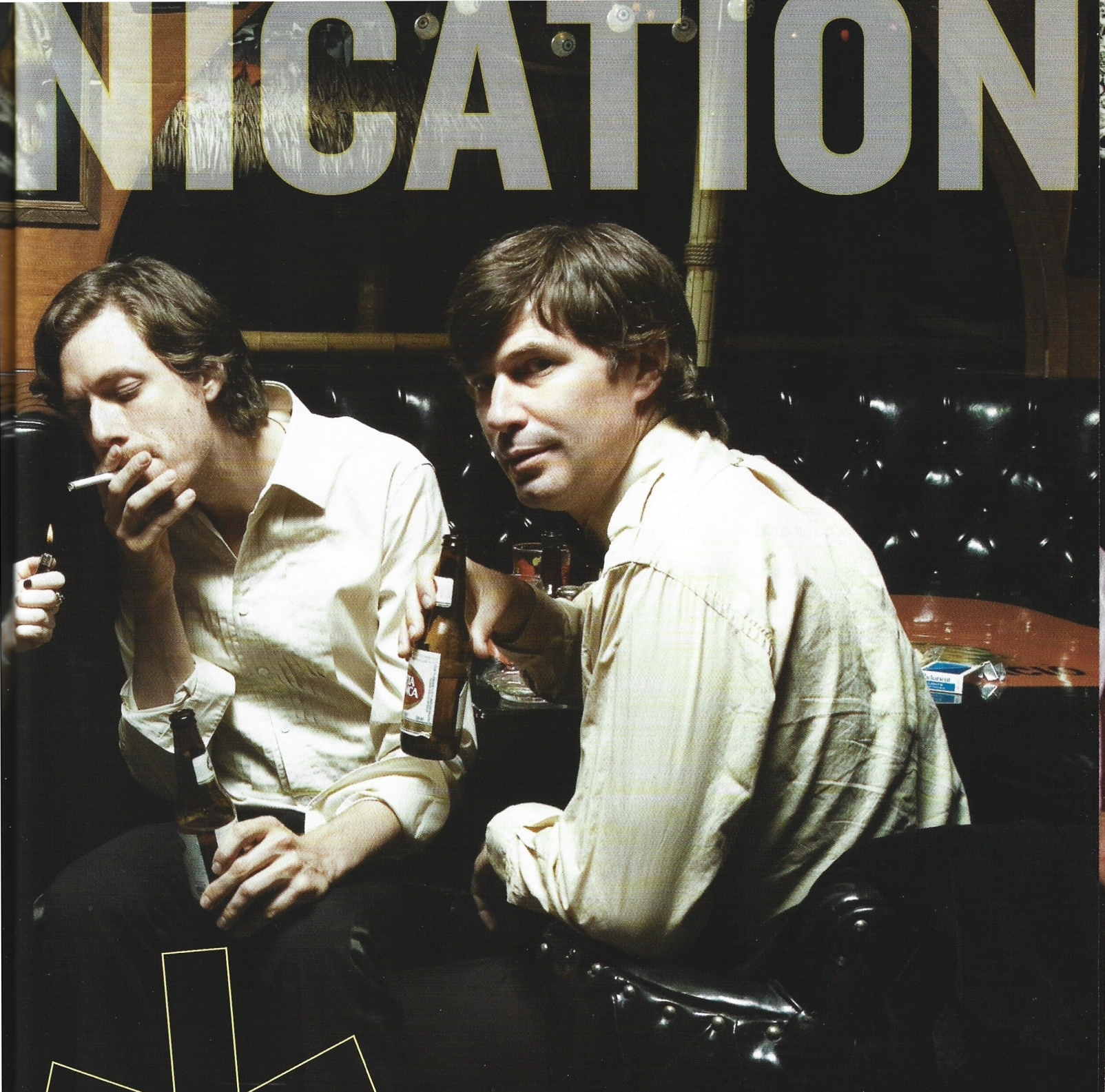


DESPITE THE ARRIVAL OF THEIR HOTLY-ANTICIPATED FOURTH ALBUM, THE EX-LOVERS OF RILO KILEY AREN'T MAKING ANY PREDICTIONS FOR THEIR BAND'S LONG-TERM FUTURE.

BY WES ORSHOSKI PHOTOS BY DAN MONICK

GROOMER: AMY CHANCE FOR SOLO ARTISTS

IT MUST GET A

little maddening being close friends with both Jenny Lewis and Blake Sennett, Rilo Kiley's founders and songwriting brain trust. And it has to be even more frustrating being their rhythm section, bassist Pierre de Reeder and drummer Jason Boesel, that is, considering the massive amounts of time they have to spend with them rehearsing, recording and touring.

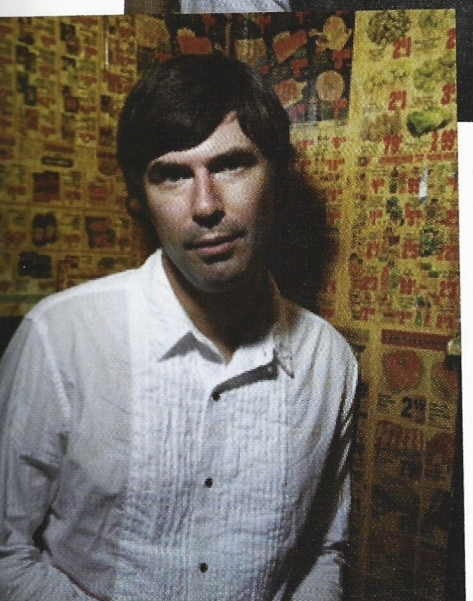
It's not that Lewis and Sennett are bad people. They're both witty, good-looking, charming. It's just that they're ex-lovers—the kind of ex-lovers who are rather adorable together; the kind that seem like fools for parting ways in the first place; the kind who are destined to get back together. And, at the moment, they're the kind that has spent the past hour matching each other's pop culture references, geeking out over TV shows and remembering '90s one-hit wonders (Us3, Dee-Lite, etc.) and each other's child-acting career, in between less giddy chatter about their new album.

They might not be over the top, disgustingly cutesy, but they definitely seem meant for one another. And if fresh break-up wounds have definitely yielded great art, from "Go Your Own Way" to "Don't Speak," somewhat stale but still-lingering heartache can create pretty great art, too. The band's new album, *Under the Blacklight* is proof.

Just to be clear, it's not a weepy, he-or-she-did-me-wrong record. Rather, *Blacklight*, with its mélange of sexy, countrified rock and electro-pop (you can even recognize Lewis' love for golden-era West Coast hip-hop), is actually a playful and diverse portrait of L.A. and its eccentric "scenes" and characters. If 2004's *More Adventurous*, in Lewis' estimation, was "like being in an airplane and looking down at California and seeing a bunch of swimming pools," then *Blacklight*, with its club kids and porn stars, is like "sinking to the bottom of the swimming pool."

And for however sweet Lewis and Sennett appear during a three-way phone call from their respective homes in Silver Lake and Echo Park, as they discuss the making of *Blacklight* along with the birth of the band, what was at times more telling was not their answers but the careful manner in which they discussed how this record came about and what future the band may have. All of that is diffused, of course, with plenty of jokes: "Every time we make a record," says Sennett, "We say, 'Well, we really took a shit on that one.' That's the career-ender.'"

With 2006 seeing the release of both Lewis' solo debut, *Rabbit Fur Coat*, and *Sun, Sun, Sun*, the latest from the Elected (Sennett's side project), neither had any firm plans to jump back into the Rilo mothership. And, truth be told, both were enjoying some time apart. Lewis' confidence as a writer and performer bloomed as she toured with her sidekicks the Watson Twins. And both she and



"I THINK I HAD A LOT OF EXPERIENCES THAT VERY FEW PEOPLE HAVE HAD. AND PART OF THAT IS WORTH TALKING ABOUT. BUT, INITIALLY, I FELT LIKE A GIANT NERD." –JENNY LEWIS

Sennett had an opportunity to decompress a bit from the building momentum and pressure of Rilo Kiley.

"We had kind of a verbal contract to, after one year of touring our own respective records, come back and make a record," says Sennett. "And I think we didn't know exactly what kind of record we were gonna make. So we kind of made enough songs for three different kinds of records, and chose the best. There were a good four rock songs that didn't make it. The dance-y kind of stuff that was based in strong, rhythmic voices came to the surface and seemed the most exciting for us. So that's what we focused on."

One of those hip-shakers is "The Moneymaker," a study of how your typical misguided youth morphs into a porn starlet and finds infamy in the San Fernando Valley, where Lewis grew up. "They showed the money to you/You showed them what you can do/Showed them your moneymaker... This is your chance to make it out of here," Lewis sings, part rocker chick, part sultry, in-character vixen in the hip, documentary-style clip for the song, for which Sennett and Lewis interviewed various porn stars. (Check it out at themoneymake.com.) Sex, attitude and reckless men and women pulse through that number as well as "Dejalo" and "15": "I got a mind if you wanna waste it/I got a man if you wanna fake it/I got a tail if you wanna chase it/I got a tongue if you wanna taste it," Lewis sings in the former.

"Having grown up in Los Angeles, you can't help but take in what's around you," she says, "and I think some of the characters that you might see walking around Los Angeles pop up in some of these songs. 'Dejalo' is a scene that could be set in the Los Feliz hills in a modern palace. Or 'Smoke Detector' might be taking place at a club on Hollywood Boulevard. The 'Moneymaker' might live in Van Nuys, the porn center of the universe."

However steeped in Hollyweird, in songs such as "Silver Lining" and "Breakin' Up" ("It feels good to be free... Honey, I'm afraid to say you deserve everything"), Lewis sings of heartache, the after effects. And between the lovely torchiness of her voice and Sennett's knack for melody and mechanics, the pair have crafted a smart, eclectic, hooky group of tunes that echo the most unlikely of influences, from country and disco to War's "Spill the Wine" and Stevie Nicks' "Edge of Seventeen."

"I think we both came in with a lot more confidence, after that year off," explains Sennett. "Sometimes there are things that you want to do, and instincts that you want to follow, that in a band context don't always happen, but when you're able to have the reigns completely, you can do whatever you want. So I think we both came back with a lot of individual confidence and confidence in each other. I think it was a really positive thing. And I feel sad for bands that aren't allowed to do that, 'cause I think it's really nice to have an open marriage."

And if Lewis' songs have a lighter feeling to them—she thinks they do, and she's right—it's because of the band members' collective breather from one another. Being able to make a solo record and tour behind it made for "a really enjoyable year," says Lewis, who was often accompanied by her boyfriend, guitarist/singer Jonathan Rice, on tour. "When you're in a band for a really long time, things can get kind of heavy, and people can kind of develop their patterns within the band, and it can take a toll. So to be able to go away and have fun while on tour, and not put any pressure on it, I think it made me realize that Rilo Kiley can be"—tiptoeing through her thought, Lewis takes on the tone of a child who is carefully, almost apologetically, telling the truth—"fun as well again."

"When we first started working on these songs," says Sennett, "we were like, 'What the hell are we doing?' But as soon as we sort of found each other again, it was great. And jamming and practicing every day, it's been consistently fun to play these songs."

"And they feel immediately better than some of our older songs," adds Lewis. "They instantly kind of clicked.

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LEWIS AND SENNETT CAN COME across as being afraid of hurting one another's feelings, and when they tip-toe around details regarding inner-band friction, they could actually be referring just as much to bassist de Reeder and/or drummer Boesel (who backed Lewis on her solo tour and who has also played with the Elected). They're less guarded when discussing, say, whether there's any rivalry between them as former child actors and if they argue over whose screen career was better. "No!" Lewis laughs. "Because I always win." While Sennett's not-too-shabby credits include *The Wonder Years*, *3rd Rock From the Sun* and *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, Lewis boasts appearances on *The*

Continued on page 144

tiny vipers HANDS ACROSS THE VOID
SUB POP
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Suzanne Vega, the Manhattan native, uses New York City as the backdrop for a collection of 11 new songs that juxtaposes images of today's cityscape with memories of Vega's haunts. The past co-mingles with the present, the public with the private, familiar sounds with the utterly new, just like the city itself.
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09/23/07 BRATTLEBORO, VT THE LATCHIS HOTEL AND THEATRE
09/25/07 MONTREAL, QC LA TULIPE
09/26/07 TORONTO, ON MOD CLUB
09/28/07 PITTSBURGH, PA REX THEATRE
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MEET EISLEY, ONE OF THE MOST TALENTED MUSICAL FAMILIES IN THE WORLD. SO WHY IS IT THAT NO ONE EVER TALKS ABOUT THEIR MUSIC?

FAMILY MATTERS

Boyd DuPree looks worried.

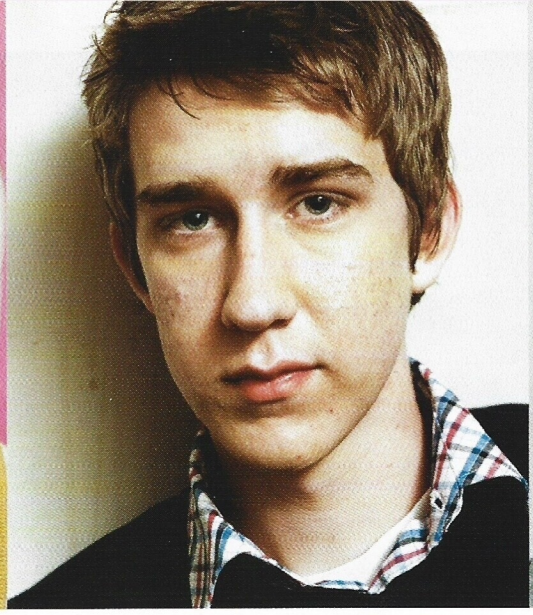
It's late in the evening in Tyler, Texas, a small suburban town about an hour outside of Dallas, and the slenssssssssder father of six is currently idling beneath a row of pine trees in a black Econoline van. The majority of Boyd's children play in the band Eisley, and, for the past 12 hours, they have been shooting a video for their new single, "Invasion," in a nearby forest. Now that the end of the day is in sight, however, everyone is laying around the van, decompressing. His daughter, guitarist Chauntelle, is resting on the bench seat behind him. Weston, his son and the band's drummer, as well as Garron, their bass-playing cousin, are sitting next to each other, singing along to a recent Avril Lavigne single.

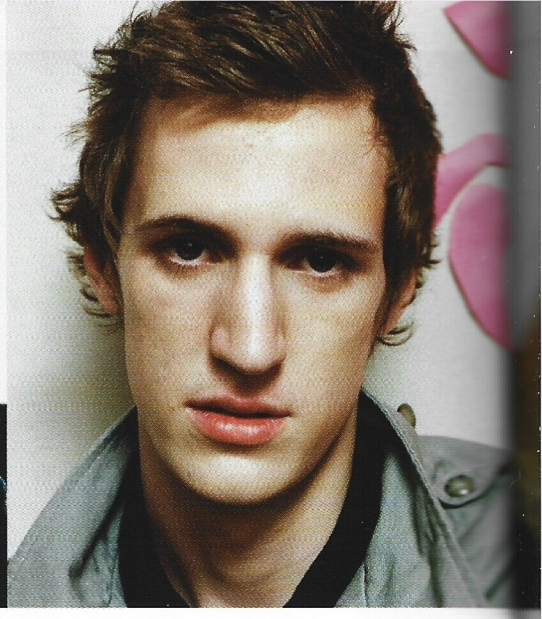
Like the kids in the back, Boyd should be chilling outright, but that seems like the last thing that he is capable of. For the past half-hour he has been sitting here with a Sidekick glued to his ear and a PowerBook on his lap, sorting through the band's itinerary for the next few weeks. Though he's not technically Eisley's manager, Boyd often serves as the glue that keeps them together, which means that he *always* has something on his plate. This week, he is dealing with the various label issues and budget concerns that have come with shooting a video for "Invasion" here in Tyler. In the next few days, he will begin working out the details for the band's headlining fall tour.

With the release of Eisley's new album, *Combinations*, a few weeks away, this is what life is like for the DuPrees. Even on idyllic days in the forest, there is still plenty to fret over. Of course, when Eisley released its debut album, *Room Noises*, in early 2005, things didn't seem quite so nerve-racking. After months of courtship, they signed with Warner Bros. and had begun working with a high-profile management company in New York City. Their first real tour was with Coldplay and, much like Chris Martin and Co. before them, many believed Eisley was poised to become the next big thing.

BY TREVOR KELLEY

PHOTOS BY AUTUMN DE WILDE





But that never happened. Instead, the response that *Room Noises* received was mixed at best. The album racked up glowing reviews in the press, but its singles—sublime meditations like "Telescope Eyes" and "Marvelous Things"—were never properly serviced to commercial radio. Sales were also iffy: By indie standards, *Room Noises* would have been a hit, but in the major label world, it was a disappointment. For the members of Eisley, the pressure that came with this turn of events was often too much to bear. "I remember feeling like, 'Who are we kidding? We're just a bunch of little kids,'" says Stacy, the band's keyboardist and co-vocalist.

In the years that followed, the attention surrounding Eisley often shifted from the music to the DuPrees' lives in Tyler. Like many residents of the city, the members of Eisley are practicing Christians who were all home schooled. They abstain from drugs and alcohol and most of them still live at home with Boyd and his wife Kim. When the band's schedule requires them to skip town, without question, their father *always* travels with them. Ultimately, these are the things Eisley have become known for. They have written some heartbreakingly beautiful songs, sure. But to certain music fans, they will always be known as that freakish Christian family from the Middle of Nowhere, Texas.

In the coming months, though, they have the opportunity to change that. With *Combinations*, Eisley have written some of the most captivating material of their career. What the end result of this will be, however, remains to be seen.

"It really could go a number of different ways," admits producer Aaron Sprinkle, a close friend of the band's who worked with Eisley on some of their earliest recordings. "I hope this album is free of those expectations, where people are saying, 'You guys are going to be the next *whatever*.' Hopefully they'll just get to be the next Eisley."

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Ten years ago, when the members of Eisley started writing songs together in their childhood bedrooms, the questions surrounding the band were much simpler. At the time, there were no videos to fret over or media angles to worry about. Their songs emerged, like most great songs do, out of sheer boredom and the desire to emulate some of the new bands they had heard about from their older friends. Living in Tyler, one of the only cities in America that boasts more Christian music stations on its FM dial than actual modern rock affiliates, it's a small miracle that the DuPrees found artists like Radiohead and Sunny Day Real Estate. But upon doing so, a new world of possibilities opened up.

"Before that our big inspirations were, like, the Judds," Weston says as a look of embarrassment crosses his face. "It was all of this country stuff. The first real record we bought that wasn't country was by Radiohead, and that led us to everything else." As just about every article on Eisley is sure to point out, some of the DuPrees were ridiculously young when they first started playing together. Back then the oldest member of the band was Chauntelle, who was 14. The youngest was Stacy, who was only eight. Yet, while most children their age were being carted off to soccer practice, Eisley began booking gigs around Texas, with Boyd schlepping the band's equipment in the family Suburban.

Not at all coincidentally, most of Eisley's first shows took place at BrewTones Coffee Galaxy, a non-profit performance space in Tyler that is run by Boyd and Kim. Seeing that this sort of thing isn't particularly unheard of in southeast Texas, the makeshift club is also part of a church that is located inside of a strip mall. As teenagers, the DuPrees watched a whole slew of bands at BrewTones that went absolutely nowhere. But when they look back now, they all admit that seeing local acts play to single-digit audiences is what encouraged them to

STRANGE BONDS

So you think Eisley is cuckoo? Here, HARP takes a look at four other musical families who have caused underground music fans to scratch their heads.

DANIELSON

Though he started out recording music alone in his dorm at Rutgers, by the late '90s singer Daniel Smith formed the Danielson Famile, a bizarre indie pop troupe that featured various members of his extended family on drums, bass and guitar. Smith has since truncated the band's name, but he continues to confuse audience members at their live shows, where it's not uncommon to catch the thirtysomething frontman taking the stage in a gigantic tree costume.

HANDSOME FAMILY

Husband and wife duos have always inspired a bit of curiosity among music fans, but Brett and Rennie Sparks, the couple behind this spooky alternative country act, have spent the past decade going above and beyond the call of duty. Aside from writing some of the creepiest songs imaginable, they have also spent much of their career getting into rather public tiffs onstage. In 2001, they even released a concert album, *Live At Schuba's Tavern*, which seemed

Handsome Family

to consist of more arguing than actual songs.

THE TRACHTENBURG SLIDESHOW FAMILY PLAYERS

After a failed solo career in Seattle, singer-songwriter Jason Trachtenburg moved to New York and, along with his wife Tina and their then seven-year-old daughter Rachel, formed this peculiar art rock project, which combines giddy live performances and, as the name implies, old school slideshows. Over the years, both Jason and Tina have frequently been accused of exploiting their young daughter's age, but hey, them's the breaks when you make dolls that look exactly like her and sell them at your shows.

MYSTERY JETS

Though the British press once proclaimed them to be rock's next big thing, this London-based retro-pop group are still better known for their unique line-up, which includes four relatively young lads and a middle-aged father. Though his only son in the Mystery Jets is

Mystery Jets

lead singer Blaine, bassist Henry Harrison is still seen as their surrogate dad. That's sweet and all, but we have to admit, his presence in the band has made for some of the weirdest publicity photos to *ever* see the light of day. TK

take Eisley a bit more seriously. "It definitely affected us," Stacy says. "We had never really seen people do stuff like that before. So for us, it was like, 'Hey, maybe that could be our reality, too.'"

Eventually, it would be. After a few years of playing locally, Eisley landed a highly coveted slot at the 2002 Cornerstone Festival (the Bonnaroo of Christian rock festivals) in suburban Illinois. Eisley's performance there inspired a flood of attention that the DuPrees weren't entirely prepared for. "They were pretty overwhelmed," says Sprinkle, who attended the event. "They went to Cornerstone hoping to get signed. They wanted to get a reaction. But I think the reaction they got was more than what they were expecting."

Indeed, following their set at Cornerstone, life for the DuPrees changed considerably. Practically overnight, every Christian label in the country was clamoring to sign the group. Tooth & Nail, home to successful Christian punk and metal acts, was the most notable. But in the end, Eisley went with Warner Bros., and the group has spent the time since playing its religion close to the vest. "For us, that's something personal," says the band's other vocalist and guitarist, Sherri. "It's not something that you want to broadcast out there for everyone... There are a lot of Christians out there that are pretty wacko or fanatical and creepy. That's why people who have faith get a bad rep."

That faith-based reputation would latch onto Eisley over the next few years, as they hit the road with everyone from Hot Hot Heat to Brand New (whose frontman, Jesse Lacey, ended up briefly dating Sherri). Though they were far from religious zealots, they could often seem that way to the various people they were surrounded by. On tour, then, just as now, the DuPrees traveled with Boyd, and they often skipped the rowdy after-parties that would follow each show. In doing so, they further perpetuated the idea that Eisley was a bunch of small-town puritans—something that still rankles them to this day.

"The biggest thing that people bring up is that we don't drink and that we don't smoke," Sherri says, rolling her eyes. "We don't do the whole party thing and that weirds people out. Everyone thinks that's what bands do all the time. But we don't. We play shows and then go to sleep." While their wholesome lifestyle distanced Eisley from many of their peers, that alienation was nothing new for the members of the DuPree family. As Sherri will readily admit today, growing up in Tyler, she always felt different from other children her age. In fact, many of the songs on *Room Noises* are about believing that there is no one in the world who truly understands you. But something funny happened to Sherri as Eisley continued to tour behind that album. She found someone who did.

*****

For those keeping track, there is another DuPree sibling out there who you might not be aware of. His name is Colin and, unlike his older siblings, he has yet to form a band of his own. At this point, his strong suit seems to be playing video games and, when I first meet the baby-faced tween at the DuPree family's house in Tyler, he is about to start a marathon session. His opponent, it turns out, is Chad Gilbert, guitarist for emo-punks New Found Glory and new resident of Tyler, Texas. Gilbert first moved here just over a year ago to be with his newlywed wife, Sherri.

The two of them originally met on tour in 2005 and during the brief time they've spent together, the tattooed mall punk star has become Sherri's muse. Though Sherri and Stacy both handle lyrical duties, throughout *Combinations*, Sherri sings almost exclusively about *him*. On "A Sight To Behold" she describes the frantic question she asked when she began falling in love, while on the album's bewitching title track, she pores over her man's emotional depth. "They're definitely more direct," Sherri says of her contributions to the album. "All my songs are basically love songs, because that's what has been going on. I fell in love, I got engaged, and I got married."

This past February, Sherri and Gilbert officially walked down the aisle at a ceremony in Tyler that was attended by various Warped Tour celebrities and members of the extended DuPree family. Earlier this year, she moved out of her parents' place and into a spacious new home with Gilbert. It's their "castle," as she jokingly puts it, and it was built based entirely on the couple's designs. For Sherri, who is still only 23, all of these changes represent her first real step toward adulthood. "There is a sense of freedom and independence that comes with having your own life," she says with an approving smile. "I wouldn't say that I feel older now, but it is definitely a good feeling."

Sherri, as it happens, isn't the only member of Eisley going through this particular transition. This past winter, Chauntelle became engaged to Taking Back Sunday singer Adam Lazzara, who she has been dating for the past year. The first time that I met the members of Eisley, they were on tour with Taking Back Sunday in Australia. This was last spring, at which point Lazzara was spending a lot of time of his downtime at Niagara, a seedy bar in the East Village where it's not unusual to see local denizens doing blow in the back room. He was also spoken for. Nearly a year before, he began seeing a stylist from Manhattan, who became a small celebrity among Taking Back Sunday fans after Lazzara included a phone message from her on his band's last CD.

So it seemed rather unlikely that a Christian girl from Texas would somehow end up with a seemingly hard-partying star from the East Coast emo scene. For a while, anyway, Chauntelle thought the same thing. In fact, during the brief time that Taking Back Sunday and Eisley spent together in Australia, she and Lazzara barely spoke a word. "We didn't even talk until the last day," she says, shaking her head. "We would say hi, but that was it. I think that we were scared of each other."

Over the next year, however, as his relationship back in New York deteriorated, Lazzara kept in touch. Soon they began dating and this past February, Lazzara proposed at a local Starbucks. As you read this, the two are moving into their first home. Lazzara is reportedly sober now and often spends his afternoons working out with Chauntelle at their local gym. Earlier that night, after they finished up filming, the DuPrees headed back to their house for a late dinner.

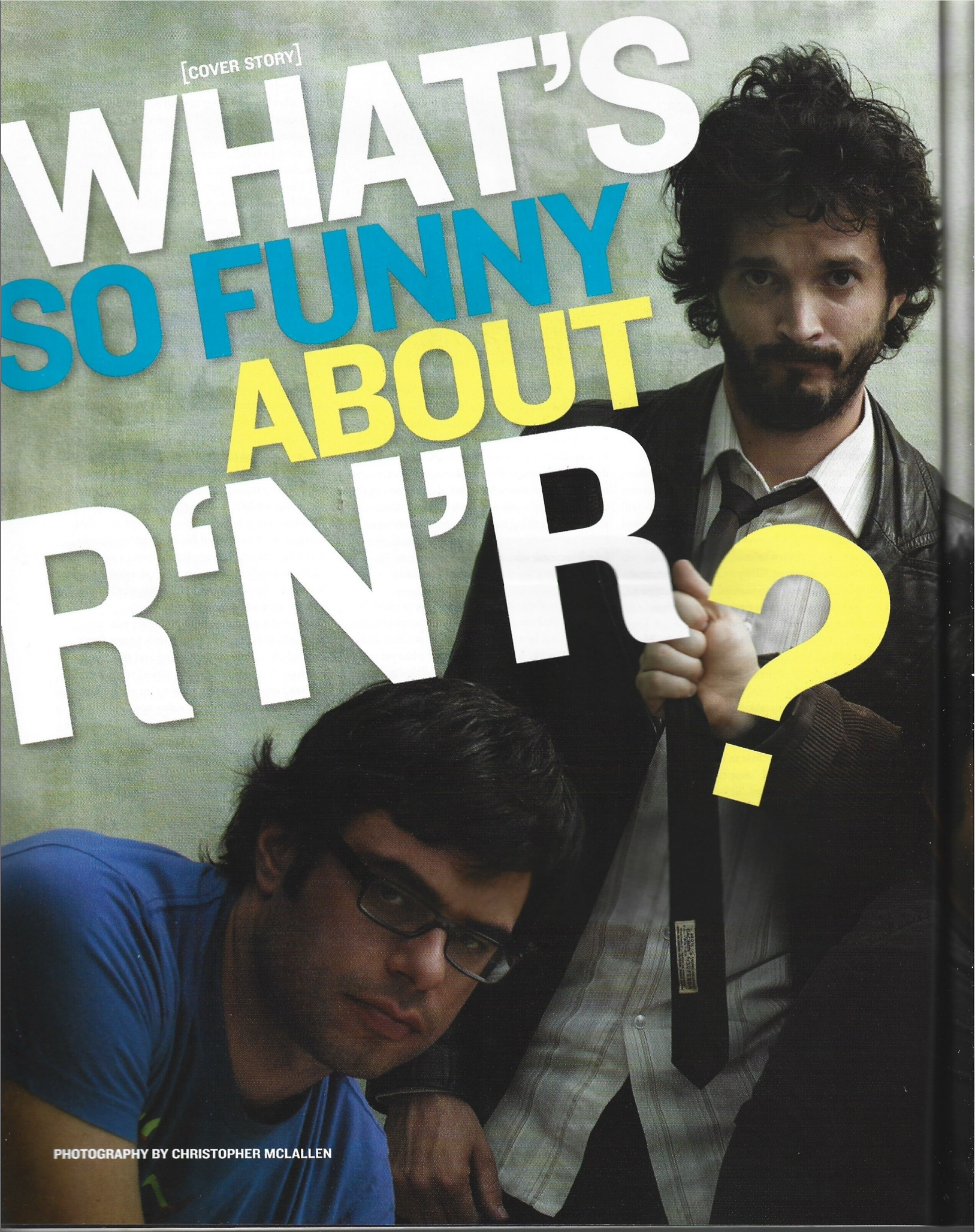
"I know that this seems unusual to other people," Boyd says, "but this is *so* normal from the inside. [Eisley started] as an average bunch of siblings that got together and started writing music. But now it's turned into this thing that people are fascinated by. But how boring would it be if they realized that we're just out in this small town writing music together?"

The interview winding down, by now the members of the DuPree family have gathered and begun socializing with some friends that have dropped by to hang out. Weston and Garron stand around in the kitchen, cracking jokes. Lazzara and Chauntelle emerge from the hallway, laughing at Colin as he bounces off the walls. In the middle of all of this, Boyd sees me and offers an escort to the front door.

Before leaving, however, I give the DuPrees a final glance. Standing there, joking with each other the way all families do, they no longer seem worried about what's going to happen in the not-so-distant future. Tonight, they have each other, and maybe that's enough. **H**

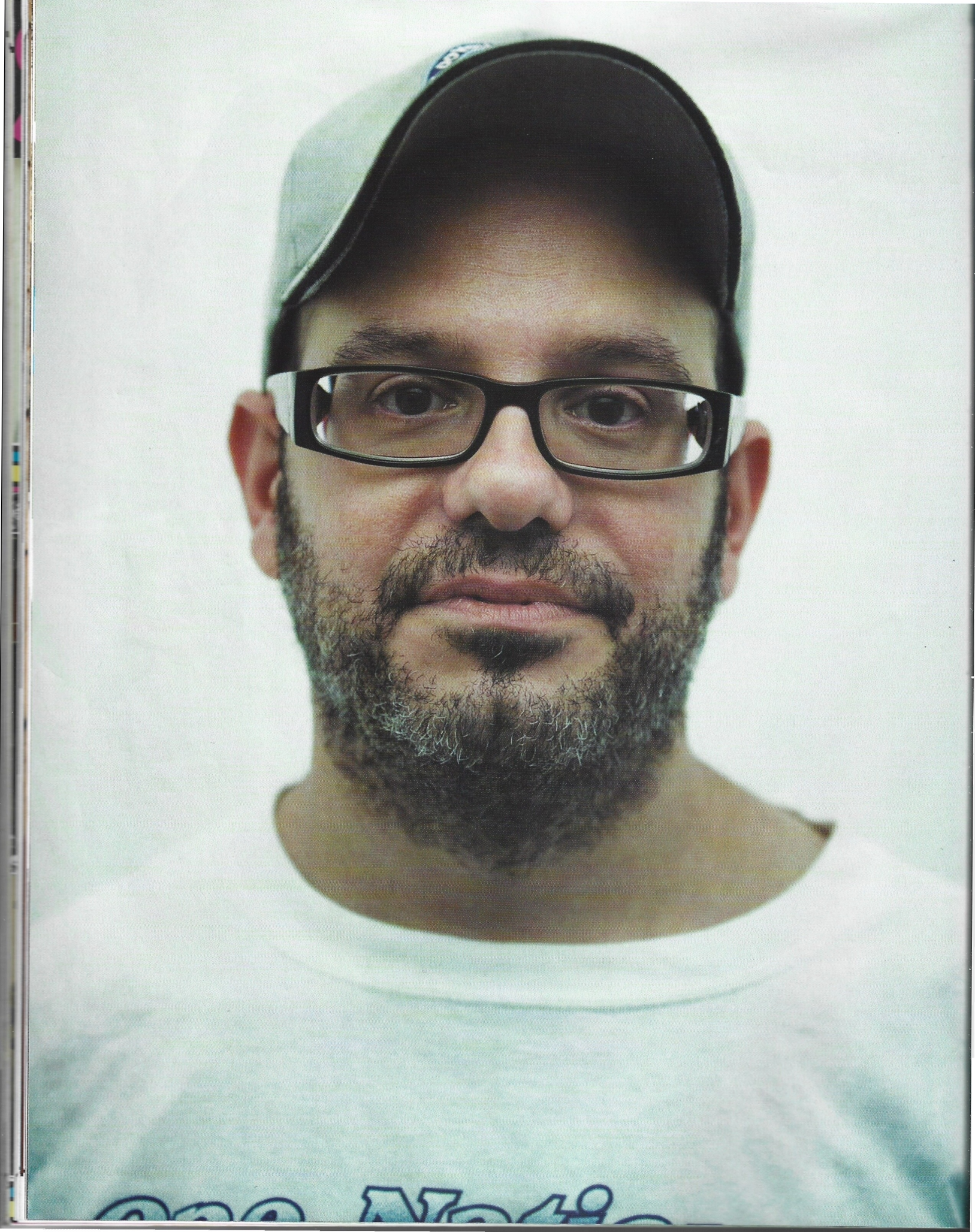
[COVER STORY]

WHAT'S SO FUNNY ABOUT R'N'R?



PHOTOGRAPHY BY CHRISTOPHER MCLALLEN

>> FRANK ZAPPA ONCE FAMOUSLY QUERIED, "DOES HUMOR BELONG IN MUSIC?" EXPLORING THE CONTEMPORARY INTERSECTION OF COMEDY AND ROCK 'N' ROLL, HARP LEARNS THAT THE ANSWER IS AN UNEQUIVOCAL "YES!"



DAVID CROSS

LAFF RIOT THROUGH THE LOOKING GLASS.

BY ANDREW EARLES

STAND-UP COMEDY HAS become complex enough that "alternative" and "underground" are now ill-defined ways of describing what David Cross spearheaded at least 15 years ago. Along with Janeane Garofalo, Cross moved stand-up comedy out of the depressing, two-drink minimum, urban-sprawl conditions of comedy clubs and into the more harmonious environment of rock clubs. Not that he didn't do his time in places like "The Chuckle Hut" or "Sir Laughs A Lot." "I did comedy clubs for about 10 years, off and on, before the rock clubs," says Cross.

After leading a small troupe in the Boston area, Cross broke into television work as a writer for *The Ben Stiller Show*, where he began collaborating with his future *Mr. Show* co-creator, Bob Odenkirk. Since the venerated HBO program's cancellation, Cross has continued to work in television, whether as memorable characters like *Arrested Development*'s "Tobias Fünke" or myriad voiceover performances for animated shows like *Aqua Teen Hunger Force* and *Family Guy*. And it's television work that has recently left a foul taste in Cross' mouth.

With Jon Benjamin, Cross co-created, wrote, and provided multiple voices for Comedy Central's animated *Freak Show*, which ran for seven episodes in late 2006. "That was one of the worst experiences that I've ever had in television," explains Cross. "It just wasn't doing the numbers that they wanted, and they moved it to three different time slots." It was the all-too-common entertainment biz problem: creative people clashing with the clueless suits.

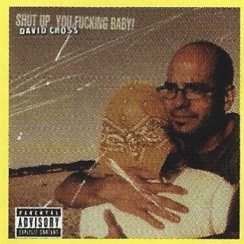
"I put a third of my energy into that show, appeasing people," says Cross. "I remember going into a marketing meeting...and urging them not to market it as a superhero parody, because that would alienate 100% of the audience. It was completely mis-marketed against Jon and I's wishes." Cross' advice went unheeded, though attacks on his common foils—the Bush administration, Blue Collar Comedy, and modern country, for instance—did shine through like a beacon. "I still stand by *Freak Show*," states Cross. "My poor attitude is partly to blame; I may not have been the easiest person to work with at that time. But Comedy Central can be blamed for the rest."

Cross found some unexpected down time this summer when HBO passed—at the last moment—on a pilot that he created, a project he had fully expected to be immersed in during the general timeframe of our conversation ("single camera, laff riot—that's 'laff' with two f's"). Cross kept busy by touring Europe for a couple of weeks, where, one can imagine, the audiences are a little different. As with all forms of entertainment, stand-up comedy is treated differently over there, especially in Britain. "If they don't like you, they really don't like you." Same goes for the reverse, and one suspects that they like Cross. "I didn't get booed from the stage or anything."

But all of that reads as if we're discussing an unknown comic, and we are not. Cross' albums *Shut Up You Fucking Baby* (2002) and *It's Not Funny* (2004), as well as his *Let America Laugh* DVD (2003—all on Sub Pop), have fared extremely well within the context of comedy albums in the '00s. This is not the '70s, when cocaine, friends, and a Robert Klein LP was considered a frequent and reliable party idea. The stand-up-saturated climate of the late '80s and early '90s produced little more than a handful of "credible" albums, and this gave way to modern times, when the average comedy fan has the attention span of an ant. Blasting through all of this, the sprawling two-disc *Shut Up...* racked up fantastic sales and a Grammy nomination for Best Comedy Album (Cross famously lost to Weird Al Yankovic, and when asked about the upset during the 2007 SXSW panel "Comedy on the Music Circuit," he hilariously responded, "But didn't we all lose to Weird Al?")

So how will Cross age into comedy?

"I plan on using mirrors. I have one in the bathroom, and an ex-girlfriend of mine left a full-length mirror at my apartment. I also have a future mirror, but it's in storage."



ESSENTIAL CROSS
Selected Discography: *Shut Up You Fucking Baby!* (2002), *It's Not Funny* (2004, both Sub Pop).

VULGAR DISPLAY OF POWER:
So many to choose from: *Mr. Show*, his *Vice* magazine column ("My America"), his gripping, impassioned portrayal of Tobias Fünke on *Arrested Development*... But in terms of catchiness and sheer staying power, we'll have to go with his *Just Shoot Me* cameo, in which he plays a guy pretending to be retarded and gives utterance to what could have been the greatest catch phrase ever: "Chicken pot, chicken pot, chicken pot pie!"

AT WHAT CLASSIC ARCADE GAME DO YOU KICK ASS?
Most everyone reading this has some sort of video game nostalgia. Like most of us that grew up in the '70s and '80s, Mr. Cross spent his fair share of time at the arcade. "Tempest was my favorite. I liked the knob controller; other games didn't have that," says Cross. "There were some other favorites, but they all sort of run together because they were all so crude and rudimentary—oh, NutBuster was another favorite, you know, you just sort of ran around busting nuts."

PATTON OSWALT

THREE CHORDS, ONEEYEBROW AND THE TRUTH.

BY RANDY HARWARD

PATTON OSWALT LOOKS LIKE what would happen if you gave a homeless guy a gift certificate to Build-a-Bear: he's kinda cuddly, but like his Creator, who made PattonBear in his image, a little unkempt. This is the comedian's great duality. He's onstage railing against absurdity and duplicity and lies with the vigor of a nerd scorned, but there's a simultaneous underlying sweetness—and joy makes his jokes and swearing go down easy. He's a bitter pill and a spoonful of sugar all in one.

Asked to pinpoint where it all went wrong—or right, depending on your p.o.v.—Oswalt points to a scene from his childhood. It's Sunday at St. Catherine of Siena, the church Mrs. Oswalt tried to get her son to swallow. Oswalt, not yet the ostensibly raging atheist with a shit-tipped blow dart for every pious prick, showed up in what you might call his Sunday Okay; he was lookin' sharp, but not sharp enough for some. "There was an elder in the church that complained about me not dressing nice enough," Oswalt recalls, "and it turned out to be Robert Hanssen, that spy that was selling secrets to the Russians. He was flagging me for not dressing nice enough, and he was trying to take out our country."

He laughs, savoring the delicious irony and stifling the gag reflex triggered by the thought of Hanssen's hypocrisy. "I didn't know it [was him until] years later. It was like, "Hey that's that guy that fuckin' reported me for not wearing a tie or somethin' like that. *Wow*! Fuckin' Darth Vader wrote me up."

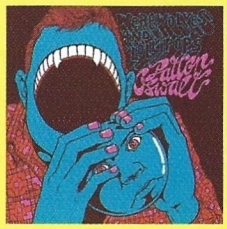
It's easy to assign Hanssen's uptight, conform-or-die mien to every other parishioner at St. Catherine's or the Megachurch in Anytown, but Oswalt is quick to note that the people at the church "were actually pretty cool," and that it's not necessarily religion he hates: It's those who pervert and sully its tenets. His is a surprisingly astute and compassionate position, since childhood scars tend to fester and breed lifelong bitterness. Not that he can't be caustic—this is a guy who called a heckler a "poor, dumb bastard" and *really* meant it, and tells hapless, homophobic Midwesterners that their foam hats are how L.A. gays advertise as bottoms. "I just keep fuckin' with 'em," he laughs.

But again, he's retained a degree of youthful innocence and hope. Here's another story from Oswalt's childhood: "For a while I tried to insist to people that I was a werewolf. [Supposedly werewolves] have one eyebrow, and their middle and ring fingers are the same length. So I would try to warp my fingers [to make them appear] the same length. They weren't, and I'd say, "I have one eyebrow. I must be a werewolf." [My parents said], "No, you have two eyebrows."

If little Patton was looking for his edge, or trying to figure out how to vent his inner darkness, he eventually found it—in himself and in Jonathan Winters and Monty Python records, and it's been good to him. Since he started doing comedy in the early '90s, Oswalt has enjoyed a steady career, popping up on TV (several comedy specials, myriad guest shots and nine seasons as Spence Olchin on *The King of Queens*) and movies (*Reno! 911: Miami*, *Blade: Trinity* and now the lead in Pixar's *Ratatouille*) in addition to headlining comedy clubs alone and with his friends as the Comedians of Comedy. He's also released three comedy albums, including *Werewolves and Lollipops*, just out on Sub Pop.

He once told *The Onion* that what he values in music is an intangible quality where it sounds like the performer is having fun, that they're *getting* to play music rather than *having* to play music. "It's just there and you know it," Oswalt says now. "You can just tell that someone's having fun." It's there for Oswalt. While he's isolating the absurdity gene in our inflated egos, skewed belief systems, careless gluttony or sloth, and general, ubiquitous nonsense, although he may appear brutal and cynical, he's coming from a place of hope.

"Most comedians I know, or at least the ones that are my friends, are pretty happy people," he says, adding that he and they *get* to do comedy, and it's a way to purge their gloom and bile. It's that quality of like, 'Now I get all this other bullshit out of my way. Now I get to play.' Remember that album *Music from the Big Pink* from the Band? It sounds like a bunch of guys fuckin' around. And really having fun."



ESSENTIAL OSWALT

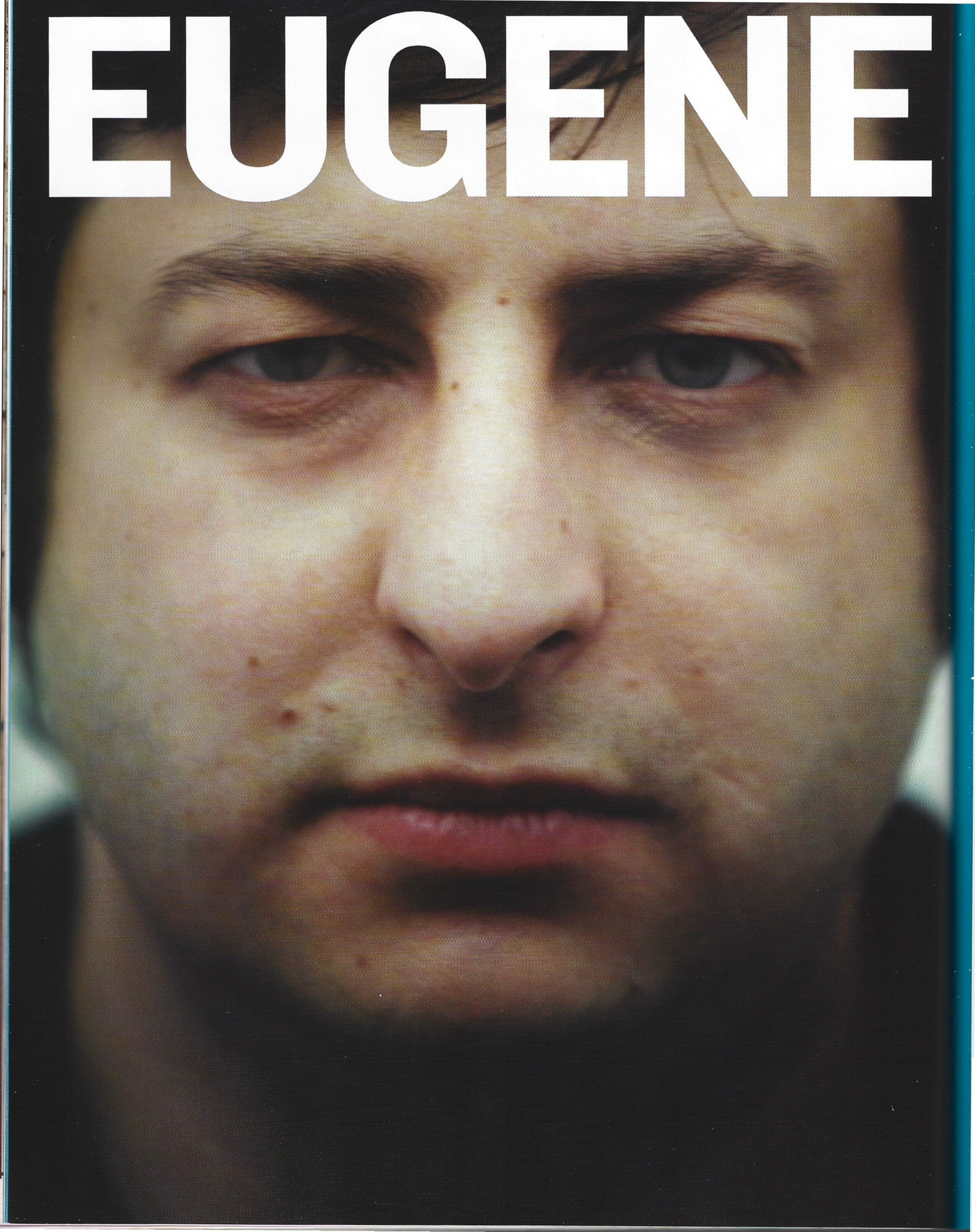
Selected Discography: *222* (Chunklet.com, 2004—an edited version, *Feelin' Kinda Patton*, is also available), *Patton Vs. Alcohol Vs. Zach Vs. Patton* (Chunklet.com, 2005—with Zach Galifianakis), *Werewolves and Lollipops* (Sub Pop, 2005).

VULGAR DISPLAY OF POWER:

He's highly visible, having turned up all over Comedy Central, Adult Swim and movie theaters, but Patton's real puissance is saved for the stage. We'll narrow the focus to "Facts About Midgets," a bit in which political correctness is blown out of its sensible shoes and stomped upon with big fuckin' Gene Simmons boots when Oswalt declares, "If you hit a midget on the head with a stick, he turns into 40 gold coins" and "If you put a midget in a tub of hot bath water, he makes sleepy-time tea."

AT WHAT CLASSIC ARCADE GAME DO YOU KICK ASS?

Galaga. Holy shit, I rule at Galaga. I don't know why I have that skill, but man— I was in Chicago last week and I snuck in to see *Ratatouille*. I wanted to see it with an actual audience, you know, not with a premiere audience. And there was a Galaga machine. The high score was 520,000 and I got 410,000. And my initials PTO are on the Galaga machine at the AMC theater in Chicago. On State Street.


EUGENE

JETHRO TULL MEETS MORT SAHL. BY A.D. AMOROSI

MIRMAN

DADA HAS NO BETTER FRIEND THAN COMEDIAN EUGENE Mirman. Mirman's made records like *En Garde, Society!* that sound like what a David Foster Wallace novel might read like if Wallace was a Russian Futurist. And funny. And touched by the gods of rock. • Mirman's got a website that features his baby picture singing high-pitched Jethro Tull medleys (among other joys), absurdist YouTube-able video surprises and wordy texts the likes of which have won attention from Sub Pop (the label that released *En Garde*), Harper Collins (the imprint publishing his winter 2007 book of advice) and Turner Broadcasting's broadband network SuperDeluxe.com, who'll host his web-only *Space Talk From Dimension Eugene* soon.

"'Surprised' isn't really the right word, but it also isn't really the wrong one," says Mirman, when asked if he's surprised he keeps getting money for his woolliest endeavors. "I feel delighted, fortunate, even sexy. Maybe not sexy. Mostly, I'm excited that there's no longer one kind of model for success. You don't need a sitcom. There are countless things you can do to be a working comic. I would be bummed out if the only thing I could do is either put out a phonograph record or appear on one of two talk shows. On the other hand, it's much more difficult to become a legend now than the 1950s. So I guess it's a tradeoff."

Born in Russia only to be exiled at age 4 ("It couldn't have been that great there; my parents moved me and my brother to America, never to return") and Boston-raised ("Was it Aerosmith that inspired me to perform?"), Mirman overdosed on a steady stand-up diet of Emo Philips, Steve Martin and Jake Johannsen throughout the '80s until he himself gave it a try. When he began in the '90s, all the comedy clubs went out of business.

"Not my fault," he says, somewhat defensively.

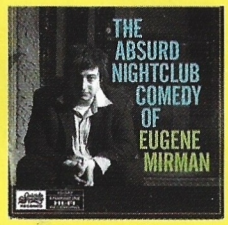
Mirman seems just fine on his own; hence the eventual self-made web stuff, the weird likes of which he's made since childhood. "I never had a video camera, but I'd sometimes rent one from a video store at a slightly depressing mall near my home—next to Caldor!"

Hence, Mirman created his own "comedy" curriculum at Hampshire College, with his thesis a one-hour standup he wrote, performed, produced and promoted. "I never understood why anyone thought what I did was so impractical," he observes. "We were all going to temp for several years until some of us gave up on our dreams." But not long after he became a Brooklyn-based comedian, Mirman and Bobby Tisdale created Invite Them Up, a weekly show held at Cinema Classics in NYC's East Village, with pals and rivals doing standup, sketch, video and improv. Mirman joined Patton Oswalt, Brian Posehn and Maria Bamford for the Comedians of Comedy tour when Zach Galifianakis left ("that makes me Ringo"), joining a group that proved that edgy standup and kindness are not mutually exclusive.

And Mirman hooked into the alterna-pop world, sharing bills not so much with the likes of artists he has on his home jukebox (Lou Reed, Rick Nelson and of course Tull), but opening for Modest Mouse, Yo La Tengo, Cake and Gogol Bordello. Musically speaking, although Mirman isn't the first comic to tour with bands ("We're just trying to relive Mort Sahl's glory days"), he does know there's a different feel between standing and seated venues. "Rock clubs generally have a much better 'vibe'—that's a real word, ask any DJ—than comedy clubs, and feel less cheesy," he says.

Mirman adds that he doesn't tailor his act differently for different bands, and that he doesn't think he could do what he does with country acts or small chamber ensembles; he couldn't live with knowing he'd blown the audience's mind. "I made a promise to myself when I was a kid that I would never completely shatter someone's worldview unless I could provide an alternative."

And yes, he's had various bands open for him. One day Mirman would like the Who to open for him: "Because it will mean I am a huge star."



ESSENTIAL MIRMAN
Selected Discography: *The Absurd Nightclub Comedy of Eugene Mirman* (Suicide Squeeze, 2004), *Invite Them Up* (Comedy Central Records, 2005) *En Garde, Society!* (Sub Pop, 2006).

VULGAR DISPLAY OF POWER:
When confronted by a Stella fan that couldn't wrap his jock strap around Mirman's material—and dared him to read his meatheaded invective onstage, Mirman rose to the challenge, calling the halfwit onstage and giving him a glorious comedy evisceration.

AT WHAT CLASSIC ARCADE GAME DO YOU KICK ASS?
My brother and I had an Atari, which was like fantastic technology to two immigrant boys from Russia. However, we weren't allowed to play it on the color TV in the living room, because we'd leave a mess everywhere. One day, we were playing it in the living room anyway and one of our parents was driving up. My brother began frantically disassembling the Atari. I went to the door, and when I turned around to tell him it was our mom, he accidentally ran into my head with the corner of the Atari and I began bleeding uncontrollably. We weren't allowed to play Atari after that. Several years later we did get a Vectrex, and I was pretty awesome at Mine Storm and Scramble.

FLIGHT OF THE CO

HBO'S RESIDENT HACK MACKS. BY RANDY HARWARD

THE WORD ON THE STREET, AS HARP prepares for its rendezvous with Flight of the Conchords, is they want to be taken seriously as songwriters and musicians. For real? Isn't this the same pair of Kiwis that sing, on "If You're Into It" from their debut EP *The Distant Future* (Sub Pop), "In the buff/Being rude/Doing stuff/With the food/Getting lewd/With his food/We heard that's what you are into?"

"I, uh, I don't really. I don't want that. I never said anything like that," says Jemaine Clement, the Conchords' bespectacled bass guitarist and baritone vocalist. "I would say our manager told them that. He wants us to be taken seriously as musicians."

"I think the idea is that we want people to know we write and perform the music," says Bret McKenzie, the dulcet-voiced co-vocalist and guitarist. "We put a lot of love into the songs."

There is merit to taking these goofballs seriously. Both have been writing songs for nearly half their lives, starting with the requisite silly love songs for crushes. "I wouldn't sing them to them," says Clement, laughing embarrassedly. "They were so awful." Asked to share, he stammers, "I-I couldn't." He blurts out a title—"In My Dreams"—and giggles. "Sorry. Horrible."

As for McKenzie, "One of my first songs was about a parking warden giving me a parking ticket. My songs have always ended up a little weird." He has written serious songs with reggae-funk-soul band the Black Seeds (he left in 2005) and solo as electronica artist Video Kid. "I still write songs that don't have jokes in them, but at the moment I tend to sing them to myself."

Clement and McKenzie were roommates in Wellington, New Zealand, when they began writing together around 1998. Clement had been doing comedy with the Humourbeasts and McKenzie was playing music, but at a time "when we didn't have much work on," Clement says they picked up guitars to learn David Bowie and Leonard Cohen songs. "We'd never remember them," Clement says, "so we started making up our own songs." Although these had funny parts, they weren't necessarily comedy songs. They played them at an open-mic comedy night anyway.

"They were usually about murder," he continues. "Almost every one. I guess we [thought] about writing songs through a character or story point of view... more like a play, I guess."

Lately the characters in the songs are Clement and McKenzie themselves, albeit in slightly exaggerated caricatures. Both are generally portrayed as dim, hapless and horny—in a very likable sense. In "Beautiful Girl," they endeavor to praise a woman's grace and looks, but end up paying her backhanded compliments like "You could be a part-time model/But you'd probably still have to keep your normal job." In the funky R&B tune "Business Time," they're hack macks: "When I'm down to my socks/You know.../It's business time." Other songs poke fun at hip-hop ("Hiphopopotamus vs. Rhymenocerous"), inner-city living ("Inner City Pressure," "Think About It") and the progression of society ("Robots (Humans Are Dead)").

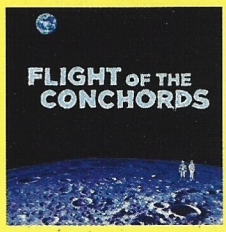
Although no longer expressly story-oriented, the smartly crafted songs provide the framework for the band's HBO series *Flight of the Conchords*. In the show, the duo appear in their caricature personalities, bumbling their way through relationships and their career (they have one obsessive fan, charmingly played by Kristen Schaal, and an inept manager who shepherds the band from his office at the New Zealand consulate). After the season finale airs on Sept. 2, the band will prepare to release their full-length U.S. debut, consisting of songs culled from their 2002 *Folk the World* live album, 2005 BBC radio series, and the HBO show.

As the series grows in popularity, with both guys gaining the animal magnetism inherent to TV and music stardom, do they note the irony that their silly songs, not their initial lovelorn sonnets, are the ones that will get them laid? Are they, uh, taking requests?

"We were offered a threesome in Scotland once," McKenzie says. "She called it a 'spit roast'—we thought it was a dinner invitation."

Truly for both Clement and McKenzie, it boils down to the music. Their songs are in fact not simple School-of-Yankovic parodies but smartly crafted tunes that span a variety of genres and work on both musical and lyrical levels, with jokes both subtle and obvious going off like fireworks. What, to them, makes a great song?

"It's hard to say," ponders Clement. "I think people fall in love with the tune first. It's pretty rare for you to like a song just for the lyrics." Adds McKenzie, "Great songs are honest and delicious. Like chocolate cake that's been injected with truth serum."



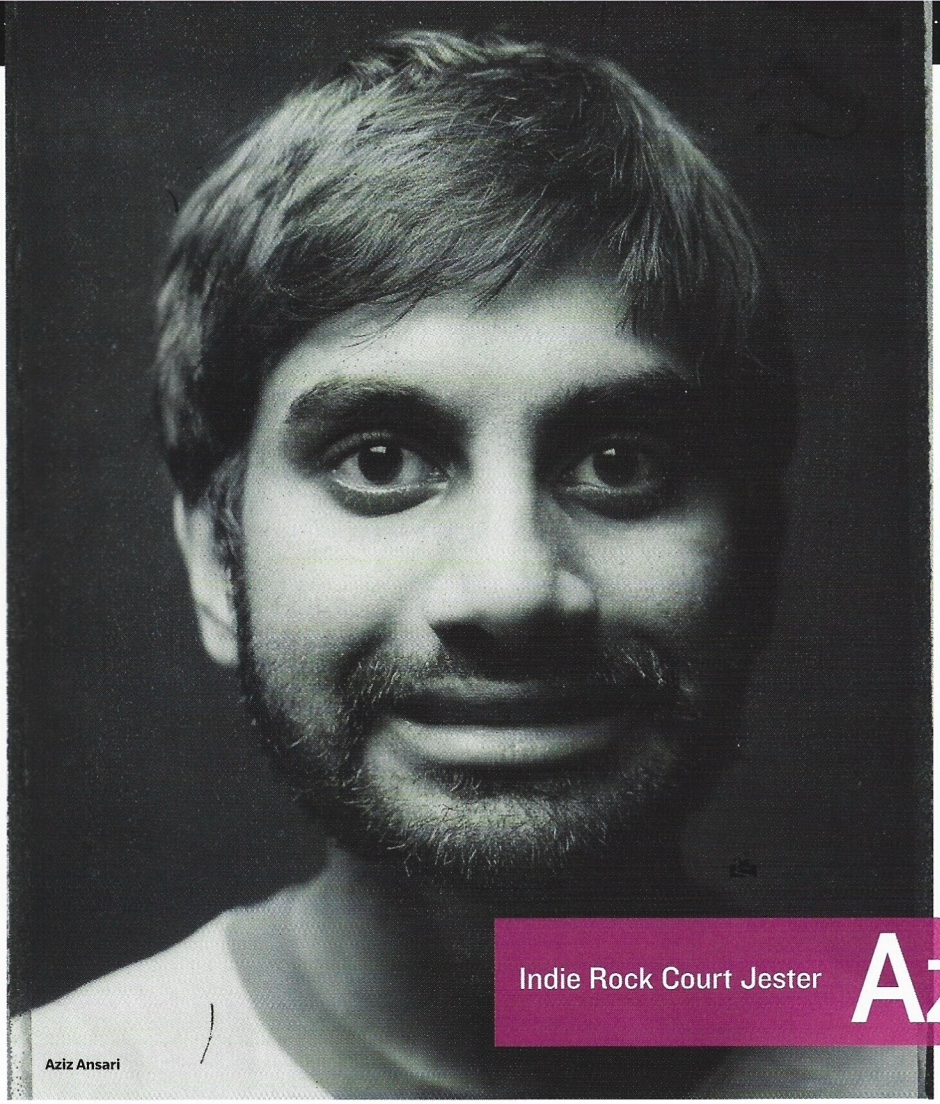
ESSENTIAL CONCHORDS
Selected Discography: *Folk the Word Tour* (Flight of the Conchords Music, 2002), *The BBC Radio Series* (BBC Audiobooks Ltd., 2006), *The Distant Future* EP (Sub Pop, 2007), full-length TBA (Sub Pop, 2007).

VULGAR DISPLAY OF POWER:
At press time, we've only seen four episodes of *Flight of the Conchords* and it's a bona fide classic—but the willpower they've shown in resisting the opportunity to lend their haggis to that Scottish chick's spit roast is simply amazing.

AT WHAT CLASSIC ARCADE GAME DO YOU KICK ASS?
BRET: I spent my pocket money on Pac-Man and Defender, but I passed most of my time playing war with my friends. If you got shot by one of the invisible bullets you had to lie on the ground and count to twenty. Then you miraculously came back to life. That's when I knew I didn't want to be in the army. You have to die all the time.

JEMAINE: I wouldn't say any, really, but I did love Galaga. My uncle had a fish-and-chips shop in New Zealand and they had Galaga. It was one of two games, and he would open the coin slot so we could use the same coin over and over again. It made me and my brother unstoppable. We were invincible because we had endless credits with the same twenty-cent piece.

NCHORDS



CHRISTOPHER MCLALLEN

Aziz Ansari

Indie Rock Court Jester

Aziz Ansari

IF YOU DIDN'T SEE HIM onstage, it'd be hard to imagine that Aziz Ansari's one of the hottest—and funniest—comics around: His lanky build and thrift-store sensibility don't necessarily lend themselves to the typical comic stereotype. But Ansari's not a typical comic: from his first exposure as a 'Net phenomenon to his recent stint on the first season of MTV's *Human Giant*, it's been clear that Ansari shares with many of his fans an impassioned love of indie rock that informs everything he does—and much of his best-loved material.

Though Ansari's been doing stand-up in New York for seven years, since his freshman year at NYU, it was his music-centric pieces (first, a self-deprecating study of his failed pickup of the rapper M.I.A with fellow comic Eugene Mirman playing the female lead, then later a bit as the dastardly indie-rock A&R man Clell Tickle, featuring Ted Leo and Tapes 'n Tapes) that gained him notoriety with the *Pitchfork* set. Ansari plays down the link ("I guess you talk about what's going on in your life, what you're interested in," he says, simply) but there's no doubt that he's managed to become a headliner thanks in large part to his association with the music scene in general—and indie rock in particular.

He wasn't always that way: though he was a long-time Zeppelin fan, Ansari wasn't embedded in live-music culture until he moved from his home in South Carolina to go to college. "I never got to go to any concerts or anything when I was down there," he says. "You move to NYC, you can see any concert you want to. Everyone comes here. It was awesome!"

Ansari's ascension was pretty quick; once other similarly minded comics—among them, Todd Barry, Patton Oswalt, David Cross, all alt-comedy legends—started seeing his set, they'd invite him to perform. He's played Bonnaroo, South by Southwest and Bumbershoot, where he watches bands sidestage—or is embedded in the audience with the rest of the scenesters. "I've done things like [the multi-comic show] Comedians of Comedy, where they really are doing a great job of finding kids that like that music and also are into comedy, and really bringing them together in a cool way. That's really fun," he says.

That said, Ansari's not so sure that there's a definitive link between music and comedy as much as fans that like both equally. "The musicians I've met always turn out to be huge comedy fans—way bigger comedy nerds than I am," he says. "I find that really interesting. There're a lot of musicians that I'm a big fan of that are big fans of guys like me." That's how Ansari's linked up with the rockers that have appeared in his videos: Some of them come to him. "Ted Leo's hilarious—he's really funny. When we've done [*Human Giant*] we'd work with actors who were not good, they couldn't do it right. Most of the musicians we've worked with—they've been pretty good. They got it."

Even with all of the indie-rock icons that Ansari's met, one luminary stands out as his favorite music-comic meet-up moment: R. Kelly. Ansari had been doing a series of shows in L.A. tied into the R&B icon's infamous *Trapped in the Closet* videos; the videos' actors had stopped by and one of them invited him backstage. "It was Cedric the Entertainer, Michelle from Destiny's Child, friends and family of his, and me and our director Jason," Ansari says. "He knew about our show, but hadn't seen it. When the new chapters [of *Trapped in the Closet*] come out, we'll get him out there, hopefully."

Still, Ansari knows he has his work cut out for him: "The [R. Kelly] videos," he says, "are way funnier than anything we could come up with." JEFF MILLER

CEO Dan Schlissel

STAND UP! RECORDS

On the forefront of funny.

The plight of indie music labels is well-known—but what about indie comedy labels?

"Indie comedy labels have it a bit easier," says Dan Schlissel, proprietor of Stand Up! Records and inactive rock label –ismist Recordings. "In rock there are so many bands and so many labels that it's hard to make an impression; it's like whispering in a wind tunnel. There aren't as many comics and comedy hasn't become as splintered stylistically as music. And it seems late-night TV always has room for comics as guests, so it's easier to get noticed."

In 2001, Schlissel released albums by Doug Stanhope and Lewis Black via –ismist, then started Stand Up! as a spin-off. He says it's still a dicey existence, but it's easier to carve a niche and he was lucky to get in early. The label now boasts 32 releases by the likes of David Cross (vinyl versions of his Sub Pop stuff), Maria Bamford, Sean Rouse, Marc Maron, Tom Rhodes, Jonathan Katz and the Unbookables (Stanhope's cadre of fearlessly edgy comics). It's a virtual monopoly on comedy's rising stars.

"We get by," says Schlissel, "and that is a nice position to be in." Also nice is being on the forefront as stand-up comedy enters a new wave of relevance and credibility.

"I really do believe that we are in the middle of a comedy renaissance," Schlissel says. "When our government goes into odd repressive regimes, the culture fires back. You can see this with rock 'n' roll in the '50s, which corresponds to the original releases of stand-up comedy on vinyl. We had hardcore punk spring up under Reagan, which was the start of the big comedy boom of the '80s." DUC PHAM

AZIZ & M.I.A.

Together at last (sorta) BY AZIZ ANSARI

Around the release of *Arular,* I had a brief post-show run-in with M.I.A. (Maya Arulpragasam) at the Knitting Factory in New York. I tried to catch her attention by speaking in Tamil, a Southeast Asian language that we both happen to speak. I said "Hey! Rumba nala pati!"-which translates to "Hey! Very good songs!" Maya said, "What?" and got into her car. I used this story to do a sketch of sorts with my friend Eugene Mirman and put it on YouTube.

The video got passed around and two years later the issue of my "crush" on M.I.A. still repeatedly comes up in interviews and I sometimes fear I'm being unfairly painted as a psychotic M.I.A. stalker. So, when HARP contacted me to conduct an interview with Maya about her new album *Kala* (Interscope), I thought it would be really fun and a good way to make sure she knows I'm not crazy. And also a great opportunity to ask her to mail me some of her hair.

M.I.A.: Finally! Hi!
AZIZ: Hey, how are you? They sent me a link to your new album and it's very good.

M.I.A.: It's just really good? It's not like, *amazing*?
AZIZ: No, I didn't have that reaction.

M.I.A.: Dang, and I was gonna ask you to marry me today.
AZIZ: Huh?

M.I.A.: [laughing]
AZIZ: I did my research for this interview on Wikipedia, mostly. It said Bruce Willis produced your new album. Why did you choose to go with Bruce Willis and how did he find time in the shooting schedule of *Live Free or Die Hard*?

M.I.A.: Well, I think the concept of *Die Hard* is very much in keeping with my stuff. Bruce Willis and DeVante from Jodeci, they co-produced it. [Note: *Kala* was co-produced by M.I.A., Timbaland, Diplo, Switch, Danja and Bangladesh.]

AZIZ: Who are some people you were psyched to find out are fans?
M.I.A.: Tim Robbins invited me to his birthday party and I got to hang out with him. He said that was a really good birthday present. He's cool; he kinda said that he'd give me guitar lessons and teach me how to sing better.

AZIZ: On "Mango Pickle Down River," who are those kids?
M.I.A.: They're Aboriginal kids.

AZIZ: That kid Keith, he sounds like such a badass.
M.I.A.: Keith's in jail now.

AZIZ: He's like 10 years old! We need to start makin' T-shirts that say, "Free Keith!" We had this little kid on our show [*Human Giant*].
M.I.A.: Can you stop trying to self-promote on *my* interview? [laughs]

AZIZ: *Oh,* hey. Come on!
M.I.A.: I'm joking. Aziz, your show is amazing. When is it on, again? Can you get it in bin Laden's cave? Because that's where I am.

AZIZ: When are you coming back to the States?
M.I.A.: [Note: M.I.A. was recently denied a visa.] I don't know. Can you go on your show and [say], "Yo! Let M.I.A. in!" Or you're gonna have to marry me and give me a visa.

AZIZ: Alright. We'll give it 'til September. If they won't give you a visa, we'll arrange a sham marriage.
M.I.A.: That's fine. If you could just put that in writing.

M.I.A.

Jon Wurster (l) and Tom Scharpling

Duo Justice

Rock, rot or rule? Scharpling and Wurster definitely rule!

THERE ARE TWO GLARING ASPECTS that differentiate the works of Tom Scharpling (a writer/producer for *Monk*) and Jon Wurster (a journeyman drummer who's manned the kits for Superchunk, Robert Pollard and the Mountain Goats) from what is frequently gobbled up as comedy: They perform long-form, call-in radio sketches—Wurster as the caller, behind one of his innumerable characters—and, as the obvious dynamics would indicate, they do it as a duo. Try explaining that as your calling card during party conversation.

"It is kind of hard to explain," explains Wurster. "I just tell people that we do conceptual long-form radio comedy. Sometimes it's a good 5-7 minutes before the main comedic thrust of the bit is revealed. That's too much for some people to sit through without being hammered over the head with a punchline."

"When people ask what we do, I usually say something like 'Jon calls in as a character and I'm the straight man.' That is actually enough to lose a fair amount of people right off the bat," says Scharpling.

Not counting irrelevant and irritating morning-zoo teams, the modern comedy world is virtually bereft of the radio comedy duo, and it's unclear why the format recoiled from the spotlight since its mid-century heyday. But this has little bearing on the fact that Scharpling and Wurster have elevated the two-man agenda to the comparative heights of Bob (Elliott) and Ray (Goulding), Coyle and Sharpe, and Bob Odenkirk and David Cross (in their *Mr. Show* guise). Using Scharpling's weekly WFMU radio show, *The Best Show on WFMU*, as the arena, Tom and Jon have rejuvenated the iron horse Straight Guy/Antagonist dynamic to showcase a head-spinning variety of situations, characters, and pop-cultural referential assaults both mainstream and obscure.

The team's body of work holds both a historical reverence of what makes the comedy duo approach special, and a wholly unique ability to take said approach to levels previously unheard of. Wurster confirms: "I really like the Coyle and Sharpe stuff. Bob and Ray. There was also an English duo in the '90s called Newman and Baddiel, who I really liked. And Bob and David, of course." The influence and appreciation stretch to include classic performances and others that simply exist in the forgotten margins of rental store. "The way Alan Arkin and Peter Falk do their thing in *The In-Laws* is just perfect. And

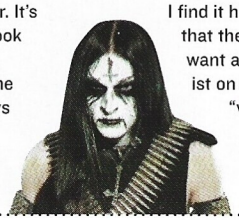
BRIAN POSEHN

Metal's lamest, er, funniest, moments

Without the tell-tale Lamb of God and Rotten Cotton T-shirts, you wouldn't know Brian Posehn is into metal. The towering comedian with the wispy baby-duck hair and Elvis Costello glasses looks more like an IT professional than a rocker, but on his debut record, *Live In: Nerd Rage* (Relapse), he makes it abundantly clear with a song called "Metal by Numbers." The tune was inspired by Posehn's aversion to "false metal," the whiny, affected, focus-grouped-to-fuckin'-death sounds that invert the inverted cross tattoos of the true metal faithful. The song gives sardonic instruction on writing false metal songs from the angry chug to, as Posehn mock-whines, "the gay part with melody." There's just no better guy to ask about metal's funniest moments.

BLACK-METAL CORPSE PAINT

Don't get me wrong, I dig a lot of black metal. Why? Because it's heavy, sometimes melodic and overall spooky. You know what's not spooky? Corpse paint. Clown makeup would be scarier. It's pretty hard to look silly burning a church, but some black-metal guys make it possible. My D&D group is scarier looking than most black-metal group photos.



CHRIS HOLMES IN *DECLINE OF WESTERN CIVILIZATION PART TWO: THE METAL YEARS*

Some might find it sad when Chris Holmes has a vodka-fueled pity party in the pool of a rented mansion while his mom looks on in Penelope Spheeris' documentary. Not me. I find it hilarious. I've heard that the producers didn't want a dead W.A.S.P. guitarist on their hands so the "vodka" the already hammered Holmes is pouring down his fat leather-clad gullet is really water. Does that make it funnier or more pathetic? Maybe both.

KISS' "LICK IT UP" VIDEO

A lot of eighties bands did *Mad Max*—inspired videos where the band walks around an apocalyptic landscape bringing the tent city denizens some post-Armageddon hair metal. And of all those silly videos, "Lick It Up" is the silliest. Kiss stomps through a tent city like the ugliest trannies to survive the end times as post-apocalyptic strippers climb out of manholes. Plus Vinnie Vincent makes Gene Simmons look handsome. RANDY HARWARD & SCOTT DUDELSON

Charles Grodin playing off Martin Short in *Clifford* is just the best. Nobody believes me when I say that, but it's true," adds Scharpling.

Things more or less started with the now legendary-in-certain-circles *Rock, Rot & Rule* recording, which aired in 1997 and was originally released as a CD in 1999. Wurster unleashes Ronald Thomas Clontle, a delusional coffee shop employee whose book on rock (it shares its title with the bit) contains a breakdown of who "rocks," "rots," or "rules," and needless to say, presents things hilariously ass-backwards. Though the bits would vary greatly over the next 10 years and four (all double- and triple-CD collections) releases that would follow, this early character, and the reaction that it draws from Scharpling, would become a sort of blueprint for the future, as well as the tone displayed in the Wurster/Scharpling-penned HARP column, "The Forgotten History of Rock."

On *Chain Fights, Beer Busts and Service With a Grin, New Hope for the Ape-Eared* and *Hippy Justice* (all released between 2001 and 2005 on Wurster's Stereolaffs label) the chemistry is unmistakable. This year, on the go-for-the-gold 3-CD set *The Art of the Slap* (reviewed in the May HARP), the past two years' worth of Scharpling/Wurster bits like "Jock Squad," "Tornado Todd", and an installment from the long-running character "Philly Boy Roy" are joined by the epic, two-part, 72-minute bit in which returning Wurster creation "Corey Harris" and his alterna-rock never-weres band Mother 13 try to be the first band to play atop Mount Everest. "We liked the idea of bringing back a character from a previous CD; we hadn't really done that before," says Wurster.

Each subsequent collection has found a larger audience, and Tom's Tuesday-night show on WFMU has nurtured a culture behind the Scharpling and Wurster brand name. Enthuses Wurster, "We're so lucky that we can do whatever we want, barring profanity, because of the nature of WFMU's freeform format. We could never get away with doing this kind of thing on a big-time radio station. And it's important to mention that the Scharpling and Wurster calls are just a small part of *The Best Show*. Tom is an incredibly entertaining and hilarious radio personality."

How Scharpling and Wurster fit into the current comedy climate is, due to the nature of their work, completely unlike the acceptance granted a stand-up comedian or televised skit show. Along with this writer, Wurster spoke on the "Comedy on the Music Circuit" panel at the 2007 SXSW conference. Other participants included David Cross and Zach Galifianakis, and the subject of how comedy has infiltrated indie rock and vice-versa was repeatedly touched on.

To give an example of how rock and comedy have become gradual bedfellows, David Cross had to leave the panel early because he was performing as part of a huge (and impossible to get into) comedy lineup around the corner, and this would not have been a part of SXSW five or six years ago. "I've been enough of a fan of comedy to make an effort get out and see shows and whatnot, and I got to meeting people that way. I was definitely a fan of people like Jon Benjamin, Jon Glaser and the Upright Citizens Brigade, so it was nice to have something to hand to them showing what we do," says Scharpling.

Adds Wurster, "Tom was [initially] more tuned into the comedy scene than I was. Through the indie-rock world I'd come in contact with folks like David Cross, Amy Poehler and Matt Walsh, but I was never really *in* [the comedy] world. And, though I'm a big fan of it, I still feel like I'm only on the periphery."

Scharpling and Wurster have gone on, both individually and as a team, to contribute writing and voices to several Adult Swim shows, including *Aqua Teen Hunger Force* and *Tom Goes to the Mayor*. This is a natural extension of their radio work, but it's their work together that produces the magic, and if the history of the comedy duo were to cease today, it would be book-ended by a sublime enigma unlike anything that has ever graced the humor landscape.

[Seek out the enigma online: friendsoftom.com, scharplingandwurster.com, stereolaffs.com.]

ANDREW EARLES

A VERY CURSORY LIST OF CLASSIC COMEDY DUOS

Penn and Teller

When the comedy duo was in fact omnipresent, up through the mid-to-late '60s, it was like any other medium that awarded us with too much. There was a lot of crap. The pre-Vietnam War era was stacked to the gills with mainstream Straight Guy/Goofball teams ricocheting family-style quips off of one another. When comedy eventually did its subversive about-face, the number of duo teams radically decreased. Yet several icons persevered, and a handful of acts dotted the years up until today.

BOB AND RAY
Bob Elliott and Ray Goulding celebrated the subtle through their long-running (1950s—1980s) radio programs and rather paltry slew of releases. Their exchanges are weird, wonderful and sharply satiric. To those unaware, it should come as no surprise that Bob Elliott is the father of the brilliant comic individualist Chris Elliott.

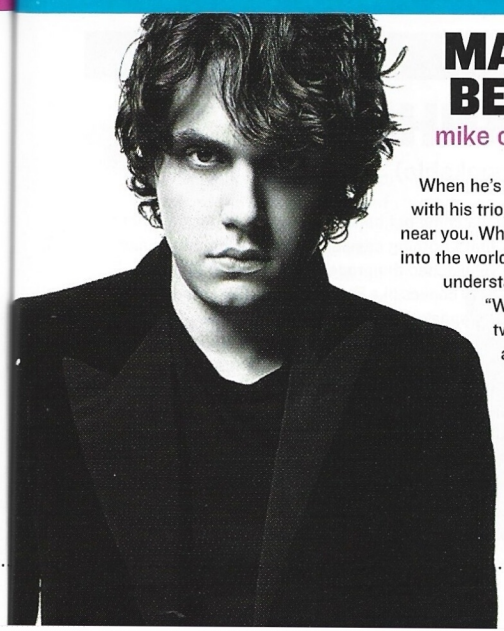
COYLE AND SHARPE
Painfully ahead of their time, Mal Sharpe and Jim Coyle injected impromptu man-on-the-street interviews with absurd requests and subject matter. Also presented by way of a radio show, these recordings are razor-sharp and Situationist at the core. The Coyle and Sharpe model would greatly confuse buyers of '60s comedy albums, so much so that their 1963 debut, *Absurd Imposters*, sold around 13,000 copies. Despite this, Henry Rollins (through his 2.13.61 label) and the deceased Sharpe's daughter, Jennifer, have led separate reissue campaigns over the past decade or so. Essential.

THE SMOTHERS BROTHERS
Now unfairly pegged as poorly aged family humor, Tom and Dick Smothers espoused a massive amount of perpetual anti-war, pro-drug satire via their very popular variety program, *The Smothers Brothers Hour*, thus becoming among the most notorious victims of network TV censorship of all time.

PENN AND TELLER
Debunking magic tricks and using a rather simple mouthy one vs. a mute routine, Penn and Teller climbed the ranks of cable TV and are almost a household name. Pretty strange for guys who used to hang out with the Residents and the Ralph Records crowd. A blast to see live; their Showtime series *Bullshit* is a must-view, and Penn will probably pop up on a quickly-cancelled-yet-great prime-time television show in the near future.

BOB ODENKIRK AND DAVID CROSS
As the hosts and primary writers for HBO's *Mr. Show*, these two redefined skit comedy and duo interaction. Aside from some chronological crossover with *The Kids in the Hall*, Bob and David are largely responsible for what could be the most important comedy creation of the 1990s.

ANDREW EARLES

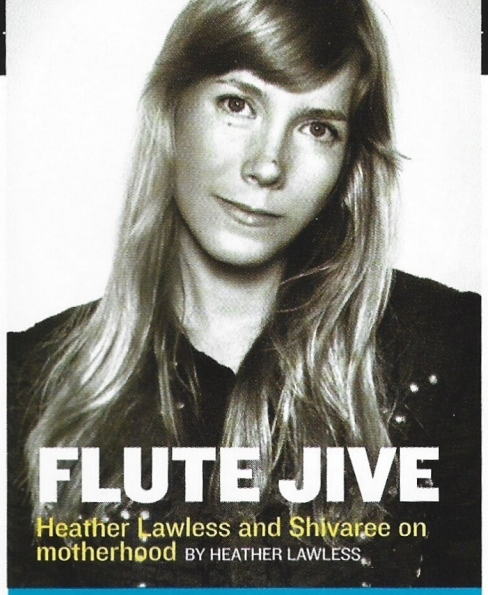


MAYER MAY NOT BE FUNNY

John Mayer hits open-mike comedy nights.

When he's not posing with blonde bombshells, blogging or jamming with his trio, you might find John Mayer performing at a comedy club near you. While it seems easy to laugh at the idea, Mayer's recent foray into the world of stand-up is not his first flirtation with comedy—his understated appearance as himself in the *Chappelle's Show* skit "White People Dancing" is actually pretty funny. Recently a two-minute cell-phone-captured video of Mayer performing a stand-up routine in New York surfaced, giving the world (courtesy of YouTube) its first glimpse of Mayer in action. Despite his routine's being two minutes too long (whoever suggested to John that Fresh Direct—an online grocery store serving New York—is a funny subject deserves to be flogged and forced to listen to "Daughters" on repeat), his self-aware YouTube greeting and Carrie Underwood bitch-slapping do warrant a chuckle.

SCOTT DUDELSON



FLUTE JIVE

Heather Lawless and Shivaree on motherhood BY HEATHER LAWLESS

Cockeyed chanteuse Ambrosia Parsley talks about her new Shivaree record, *Tainted Love: Mating Calls & Fight Songs* (Zoë/Rounder), about new motherhood and love gone way wrong. She was interviewed by childless but tuneful stand-up comedian Heather Lawless, soon to be seen with Jack Black in Michel Gondry's new film *Be Kind Rewind* and heard in Adult Swim's new, animated show *That Crook'd Sip*.

Which do you love more? Rock and roll or your baby?

That's a really tough one, and I'm notoriously bad at making choices, so the best solution for me is to try to combine the two whenever possible. I got pregnant in a closet at the Bowery Ballroom. Louie toured the South in vitro, was introduced in his watery nest to soundchecks, barbecue and Baptists. And it seems to be working out great—he's already mastered the perfect mojito and he's crazy for Little Richard.

You chose several of the most notorious and possibly morally bankrupt male artists of the past half-century to cover on this album. Do you feel your pregnancy made you temporarily sympathetic to very extreme acts of passion, drug rage, pedophilia and spousal violence?

◦ No, it's more like the hormone surge makes you *less* tolerant of pretty much everything. Where I'd previously find my husband's behavior mildly annoying or childish, when I was pregnant I could fly into a violent rage at the mere sight of him. And I was so repulsed by the smell of cigarette smoke that I began threatening strangers on the street.

What's more thrilling? Performing in front of a sold-out audience, or breastfeeding your son in public?

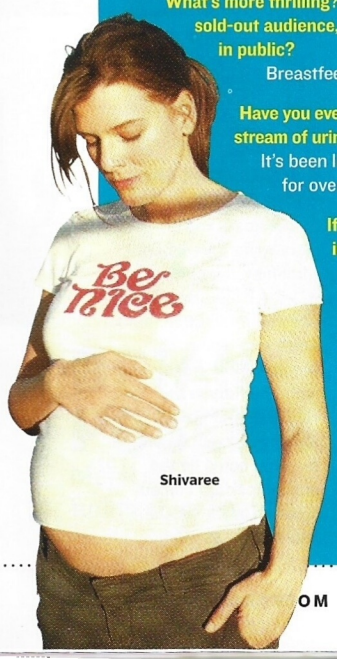
Breastfeeding a sold-out audience.

Have you ever made contact with a stream of urine above your waist?

It's been like once or twice a month for over a year now.

If your son could play one instrument, what would you want him to play? And try not to say the hand flute.

Children are so pushed these days, so micro-managed. I would just hope to teach him that if he chose to play the hand flute, it's important that he be the best damn hand flute player that he can be.



Shivaree

Must-Have Laughs

10 comedy albums that any self-respecting comedy geek should own (or at least illegally download from somewhere) BY *CHUNKLET*'S HENRY H. OWINGS

GEORGE CARLIN

***Occupation: Foole* (Little David, 1973)**

Where does one start? Carlin continues to be the preeminent student of profanity and its hypocrisy. Any of his albums in the past 10 years are even more ruthless, but this album is a guaranteed good introduction.

BILL COSBY

***To Russell, My Brother, Whom I Slept With* (Warner Bros., 1968)**

It's nearly impossible to pick just one Bill Cosby album, but this one is a perfect springboard if you could buy only one. "Wonderfulness", "Why Is There Air?" and "200 MPH" are other snapshots of his flawless, family-friendly performances from the mid '60s.

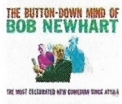
STEVE MARTIN

***A Wild and Crazy Guy* (Warner Bros., 1978)**

A dada comedian who Marcel Duchamp, if he were alive today, would adore. A banjo, an arrow through the head and a white suit? Who would've ever imagined? Although *The Jerk* is a comedic benchmark, it's hard to believe he would go on to such tame fodder as *Cheaper by the Dozen 2*.

BOB NEWHART

***The Button-Down Mind of...* (Warner Bros., 1960)**

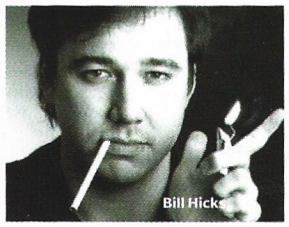


This accountant-turned-comedian was one of the first "gateway" comedians who went from the comedy clubs into middle-America homes. One-way phone conversations were his signature, and "Abe Lincoln Vs. Madison Avenue" encapsulates it perfectly.

THE SMOTHERS BROTHERS

***Live at the Purple Onion* (Mercury, 1961)**

The alpha and omega of folk satire. This, their debut album, was recorded at a famed basement in San Francisco and fires on all cylinders. Although all of their albums are great, this one is their most genuine.



BILL HICKS

***Rant In E Minor* (Rykodisc, 1997)**

A then-modest (posthumous) release that has since become a benchmark for on-the-fringe comedians from David Cross and Mitch Hedberg to, well, almost any other comedian who has stepped foot on stage at Largo or the UCB Theater.

RICHARD PRYOR

***...Is It Something I Said?* (Warner Bros., 1975)**

Redd Foxx planted the seed, but Richard Pryor made it grow beyond anybody's expectations. If bits about cocaine and white people don't make you laugh, Pryor's character Mudbone will.

NATIONAL LAMPOON

***That's Not Funny, That's Sick* (Label 21, 1977)**

Without a doubt, the most ruthless audio recording that the NatLamp ever did. John Belushi, Richard Belzer, Bill Murray and Christopher Guest all working together before they all became famous outside of this album. Also features music by Paul Shaffer. Who knew?

WOODY ALLEN

***Standup Comic* (Casablanca, 1979)**

A rock-solid collection of Allen's mid '60s material. At times absurd, flighty and bizarre, his stand-up origins still stand up.

LENNY BRUCE

***Carnegie Hall* (United Artists, 1972)**

An increasingly erratic performer, "Carnegie" is Bruce on top of his game in '61—exploding taboos and conventions, making brilliant comedy that feels like a revolution.

HONORABLE MENTIONS:

It's pretty unfair to shoehorn so much essential funny into just 10 albums. All the following are as essential, but I'm only given so much room. It's like cramming an elephant into a closet. So unfair.

CHEECH & CHONG
Los Cochinos
MONTY PYTHON
Matching Tie and Handkerchief
ANDY GRIFFITH
What It Was, Was Football
DEREK AND CLIVE
Come Again
DICK GREGORY
In Living Black & White
STAN FREBERG
The Very Best of...
CARL REINER & MEL BROOKS
The 2000 Year Old Man
REDD FOXX
Uncensored
FIRESIGN THEATER
I Think We're All Bozos on This Bus

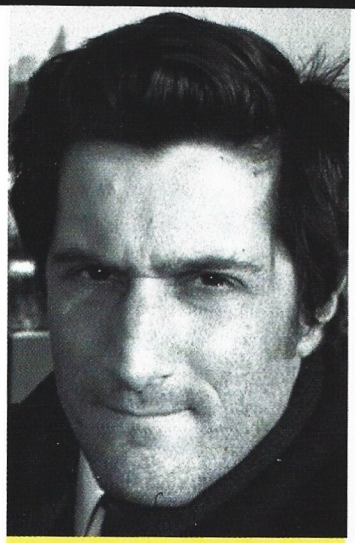
DOUG STANHOPE

Unrepentant (and unbookable)

All music fans have stories about watching pet bands get big and become pathetic shells of their former selves. But that's nothing compared to what comedians like Doug Stanhope have seen. They've watched the process happen to the entire business of comedy. Where raw, dirty comics like Richard Pryor, Sam Kinison and Andrew Dice Clay were once able to speak their mind *and* become stars, Stanhope's having trouble even finding places to do his own raunchy yet relevant jokes. Lately, he's been ditching comedy clubs for the friendlier confines of rock clubs.

"Comedy clubs are too sterile and boring," he says. "They've trained audiences to think that all comedy is Jay Leno-friendly shit, birthday parties and bachelorette parties. The people there don't give a shit about the art or what I do."

To help spread the word about raw, progressive comics, Stanhope formed the Unbookables, which the group's website calls "a brand name for a type of comedy ... that you may have assumed no longer existed." "There are so many great comics that are too dirty for the audience, or they're drunks or drug addicts and won't kiss club owners' asses," he says. "I'm trying get people I think are funny some work." HAL BIENSTOCK



MICHAEL SHOWALTER

Bold as Screech

THERE'S A FEW THINGS that dry-as-dust Michael Showalter wants you to know before he makes his debut recording, a live CD he may call *I Am My Own Worst Enemy*. He's only mildly bored by questions regarding *Wet Hot American Summer* and other past projects (cult classics to us) like *The State*. ("The same "I don't know" response for ten years regarding [a DVD release] makes for pretty dull conversation.") In addition, he's listening to early Joe Jackson and Depression-era music ("I know that sounds like a bullshitty answer—like I actually have the nerve to say I'm listening to George Gershwin, but it's true") and playing air guitar to John Mayer's cover of "Bold As Love."

"After John's over I play Jimi's version, switch to lefty air guitar and do the whole thing over again."

Otherwise, Showalter keeps time with J-Dub Records output (like Matisyahu) since that's who's releasing *Enemy*, which is inspired by De La Soul's *3 Feet High and Rising*. "It's just a total mish-mosh of stuff; no real through-line; they just tried everything. That's kind of what I'm doing."

"I reminisce about my adolescence; talk about sandwiches; tell...about the time my girlfriend gave me an anti-psychotic and told me it was a sleeping aid. I read some of my bad poetry. I talk about the time I was mistaken for Dustin Diamond a.k.a. Screech. That pretty much covers it."

Showalter says the effect is similar to watching "your favorite band's keyboardist's weird side project" and thinking, *That was either totally amazing or it totally sucked*. "And you're genuinely not sure which." A.D. AMOROSI

Reggie Watts

Loops, laughs and improv

The former Maktub singer started performing his solo comedy/music shows about 2 years ago, building soulful sounds out of looped vocals and a delay pedal and creating comedy out of whatever crosses his mind. "Ninety-nine percent of it is improvised," he says. "I talk about anything from technology to role playing to sexuality and relationships." Although he never knows in advance what he's going to say, he says he's grown "a bit more confident about what... I'm about to hear."

Watts' show is an intertwined mix of music and humor. "Sometimes you make a *sound* and people laugh," he says. "So you can mix timing, sound and lyrics together and it makes for a very funny experience."

For instance, one of Watts' few set pieces is a sweeping radio ballad, accompanied with classic soul keyboards and sung with Lionel Ritchie-esque sincerity. The title? "What About Blowjobs?" "It's just an analysis of a blowjob, very step-by-step and clinical," says Watts. "I envision it being like an '80s singer-songwriter ballad... but the contents are ridiculous." JENNIFER KELLY

TRAINWRECK

Kyle (hasn't) left the band

If Kyle Gass ever does quit the band (that would be Tenacious D), he'll change his name, his look, round up a posse, and really hit the road. Klip Calhoun, a be-vested Roy Orbison-meets-John Wayne type with an is-it-or-isn't it greaser 'do, will play guitar and sing with a Trainwreck. *The Trainwreck?* No, just Trainwreck.

Now that he's been in one of the greatest rock bands ever, Gass, er, Calhoun, will play in the greatest...? "Uh, I don't know what we are a... countrified—rockabilly, I think it's called. It's kind of a rock, swing—it's a trainwreck of genres. We smash it all up in there and see what happens." There's also the secret ingredient, which Gass brings from The D: jokes. They're subtle, compared to Tenacious D's f-bomb festival, but no less funny—most of the jokes are in the style and sound, be it the exaggerated growl of a wah pedal, or the synth flute intro to the cock rockin' pomposity "Rock Boulder Mountain."

Gass formed the band in 2001—"I think it was so I could talk more onstage," but also to play more shows. "The D is like a big, slow-moving dinosaur now; it takes a long time to get anything going. I wanted something a little more nimble." Trainwreck has been piling into fans since, touring and releasing *Trainwreck Live* in 2003 and an EP last year. "We're workin' on the full-length," dishes Gass. "It's, I would say, 7 to 12 times better [than the live record]. Easily." DUC PHAM

Dolemite

Still talkin' dirty

It takes serious balls to call Rudy Ray Moore, a.k.a. Dolemite, at his hotel room at 6 a.m. HARP did it. And you know what that means: we're extraordinarily gifted in both the physical and the abstract sense. Unless, of course, calling by appointment somehow mitigates our pluck. It does? Well, we might as well have been calling cold. And you know what that means.

"Calling my number and I don't know who you are—*what do you want?*"

That's when you invoke the Ice Cream Man, the liaison between the Disco Godfather and anyone who dares go phone-to-phone with him. Suddenly, all is cool.

"Oh, yeah. This is me. This is Rudy. Very well, then. Go on and shoot, 'cause I gotta get outta here and go to the airport."

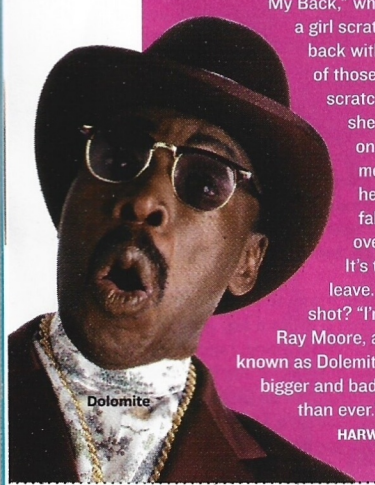
The idea was to talk to Dole about his favorite dirty songs, not necessarily his own. But this is Dolemite, motherfucker. Of course he's gonna pick his stuff.

"My greatest hit is the "Signifyin' Monkey," which is [definitely not] G-rated. "Petey Wheatstraw, The Devil's Son-in-Law" and "The Human Tornado" have been the best of Rudy Ray Moore. Naturally, "Dolemite" is the all-time best."

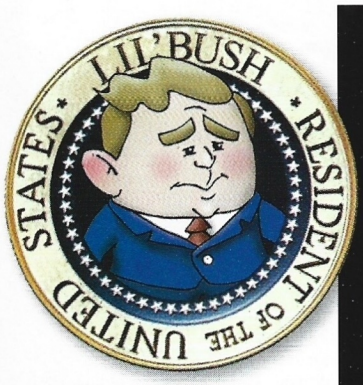
Okay, how about the new movie, *The Dolemite Explosion*? Ice Cream says Dolemite has been living in Africa lo these many years, but "the streets get hot" and he's called home.

"*Dolemite Explosion*... I have been chosen... to survive the explosion. In this film I have the martial arts scenes [choreographed] in the sophisticated style that I have done them in with my own stylin'. And they come off real well. In other words, I am the victorious one. I get knocked around a little bit, too. One of the other highlights in the film is the sex scenes. I'm doin' one called "Scratch My Back," where I have a girl scratchin' my back with one of those back-scratchers and she gets up on top of me... and her bust falls out all over me."

It's time to leave. Parting shot? "I'm Rudy Ray Moore, also known as Dolemite. I'm bigger and badder than ever." RANDY HARWARD

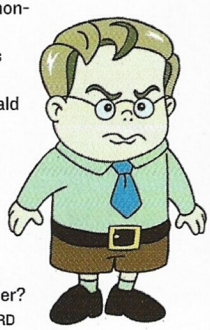


Dolemite



ROCK 'N' ROLL VOICEOVER, REDUX

If you've been watching *Lil' Bush* on Comedy Central, you may have picked out a few famous voices. Jeff Tweedy (God), Frank Black (Satan), Dave Grohl (himself), Anthony Kiedis and Flea (as their be-socked selves) have all guest-starred on the Bush-bashing animated series, and Iggy Pop is a regular, playing Lil' Rummy, the pint-sized version of everyone's favorite warmonger, former United States Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld. Rather appropriate, wouldn't you say? One Stooge portraying another? RANDY HARWARD



Lavender Diamond's Becky Stark

Party out of bounds

Before she sang with Lavender Diamond, back when she attended Brown University, Becky Stark was a comedienne. "We had a sketch comedy troupe called Out of Bounds," she says, adding she tried to blackball John Krasinski, now famous as Jim Halpert on NBC's *The Office*. "I was like, He's funny and everything...but I don't know if he's crazy enough." Stark says she was attuned to "kind of super-wild, weird comedy" and that Krasinski was too subtle—but it worked out. She's since had a few chances to go buck wild, doing sporadic stand-up in L.A., but now she wants to focus on a musical comedy variety show that she's editing. "That's my dream," she says. At the Sundance Film Festival last January, she got to tell her idol, Stephen Colbert, about it. "He was like, "Hmm...let me guess...," and he totally looked me up and down. "[Your show] would be about a girl, played by you, who's saving the world through glamour."

"Of course I was totally dumbfounded, because in the most distilled sense, that is kind of what I'd love [to do]." RANDY HARWARD

Holy Muckle

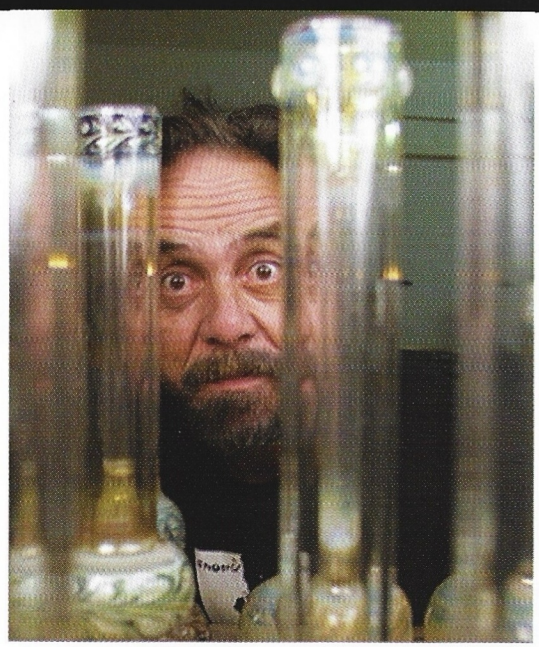
Product debasement

FROM STAN FREBERG TO FIRESIGN THEATER to *Saturday Night Live* for the past 32 years, fake product advertisement has been a comedy staple for decades. Guerrilla comedy ensemble Holy Muckle has raised the parody ad concept to brilliant (and copyright-infringing) new heights. The Muckles' insidious twist? Fake commercials for real products—a Hardee's spot featuring a guy's profane Homerian odyssey to buy burgers for his hunting buddies; a Pizza Hut promo for an eight-cheese Triple Bypass pie; a darkly hilarious take on Paxil, featuring a psychopathic pilot and *Apocalypse Now* filmmaking devices soundtracked by the Doors' "The End" and Phil Collins' "Take Me Home." Don't ask where the Herbal Essences has been in the shower scene.

"Advertising, at the heart of it, is trying to relate to people. What's so sick is how it doesn't at all," says the underground comedy entourage's spokesperson. "ESPN's commercials are the best on TV. They incorporate their own product and they're freaking hilarious. That's genuinely good advertising. Most of these scumsuckers are treating everybody like cattle."

The Muckles are aware of the grayness of their legal area. They operate without a web or MySpace presence and are determined to remain anonymous for as long as possible. "We've gotten offers to do actual commercials, but the conundrum is this isn't Holy Muckle," says the mouthpiece.

Most widely accessible at YouTube, the Muckles are also notable for being screened at My Morning Jacket concerts by virtue of frontman Jim James' admiration of their work. Holy Muckle's spook says that the group is nearly finished with new spots for Cingular Wireless ("Now the fuckbeast that is AT&T...") and Visa, rumored to be more vicious than the group's first eight creations. BRIAN BAKER



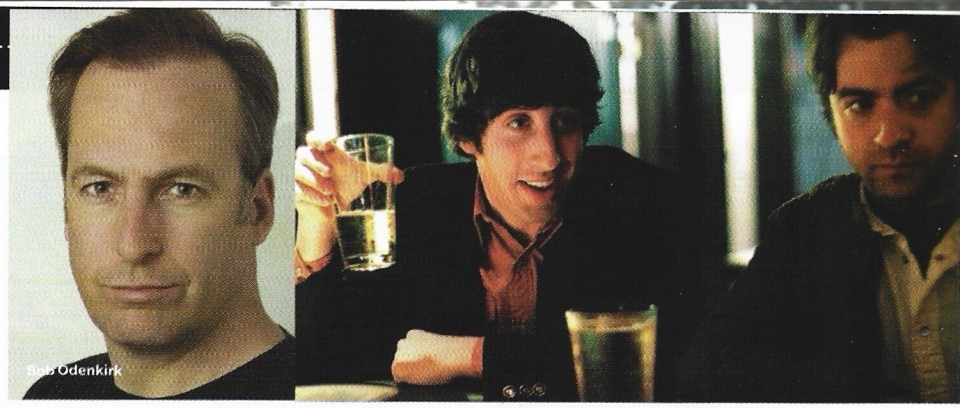
TOMMY CHONG

From guitar to bong

Long before Tommy Chong became the world's most famous pothead, he bought Vancouver's Elegant Parlor nightclub, where he played guitar and sang for the house band, Bobby Taylor & the Vancouvers, who eventually signed to Motown and scored a Top 30 hit in 1968 with "Does Your Mama Know About Me." Although Chong admits he was the least talented member of the band, he says he was "the unofficial leader" because he cut the checks.

The rumor is that the Vancouvers featured Jimi Hendrix for a stint, but Chong is quick to dismiss this fabrication. "First of all, Hendrix was never in the band. That was a big Bobby Taylor lie. You gotta remember Bobby Taylor exaggerates to the point of distraction; I think he even had the Beatles opening for us or some bullshit. Bobby is a professional liar: I love him to death and he can sing, but Hendrix was never in the band," says Chong. "We only played with Hendrix one time [in London] and it was probably the most profound musical experience I've ever had."

After getting fired from the Vancouvers for missing a gig to get a green card (he was a Canadian citizen), Chong went back to Vancouver and met Cheech Marin. The rest is history. "We did nine months in an improv group and that eventually led to Cheech & Chong," he says, "and that led to fame and fortune." AARON KAYCE



Home Page

Talent finds an outlet with online TV channel SuperDeluxe.com.

LADIES AND GENTLEMEN, welcome to the far-off, far-out future. So much, yet not much, has changed—but they did manage one particularly neat trick: They're turning everything into TVs. You can now watch television on telephones, computers, and soon even your own belly. Joining such innovative, groundbreaking networks as Weird Al's UHF Channel 62 and David Lee Roth's DaveTV is Turner Broadcasting's SuperDeluxe.com, a broadband TV destination where imagination is free to run pants-down into verdant fields of non-union, lump-sum cash. The half-naked talents taking advantage of this range from ultra-underground cult filmmaker Wayne Alan Harold and Genuine Nerd Toby Radloff to nascent sketch comedy troupe Olde English, comedy media empire Chunklet, and comedians like Bob Odenkirk and Maria Bamford, with whom HARP chatted about their experience with this TV station of the future.

Did you choose SuperDeluxe?

Bob Odenkirk: They came to us and said, "Do you wanna do [*Derek & Simon*] for our network?" I said, "Sure. I don't care what you do with it [*laughs*] as long as you let me make it." SuperDeluxe is doing it right... I give 'em so much credit for takin' the time, investing in people, giving people chances to try stuff and to grow and not rushing into it. They just came on, didn't do really any promotion, let people find them. They're really layin' the groundwork.

Maria Bamford: I had done a one-person sitcom at Edinburgh Festival, Melbourne Comedy Festival [and] in L.A. and sent a tape to [SD producer] Dan Pasternak and he said okay.

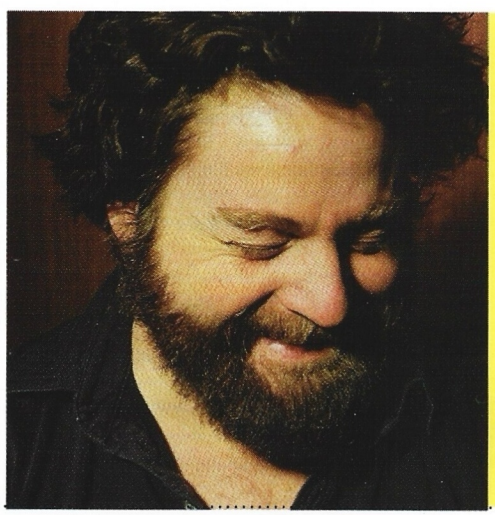
Bob, you seem to be embracing alternate venues for your stuff—Adult Swim, *Wholphin* and now SuperDeluxe.com.

BO: I've been really working hard at feature films the last couple years, and when you're doing that, it's extremely long-term. Just to keep myself happy, makin' short pieces for various outlets is really, really great.

What are the benefits of producing short-format programs?

MB: It's shorter. Less time, less stories, less complication—for me, anyway. It's like stand-up jokes, very short. There are no network notes and we can do and say whatever we want.

BO: A lot of this stuff you can do on weekends, or a little at a time, because it's very manageable. The ideas are quick and you don't have a lot of layers to them. DUC PHAM



PAMELA LITTKY

ZACH GALIFIANAKIS

Arby's and the barbaric yawp

We all have our pet nemeses—some of us hate Denzel Washington or gap-toothed people (talkin' to you, Lauren Hutton). Others are offended by peccadilloes like the word peccadillo. Zach Galifianakis brings up Arby's enough in his act that HARP had to learn the source of his thinly sliced aversion to the fast food chain.

"It's just pathetic enough," explains Galifianakis. "Arby's is one of the most desperate places you can end up eating. I'll never forget—I was in Greece once and the day I left, I swam out to some fish boats and was talking philosophy and politics with these old Greek fishermen in this clear water. Life was amazing. And within a 24-hour period, I end up back in L.A. and I get a knock on my door. My neighbor was askin' me if I was gonna use my Arby's coupons that I'd gotten in the mail. I thought, wow—what an amazing look at life, being in the middle of the Mediterranean 24 hours ago and then having your neighbor ask you for your Arby's coupons."

As shown on his DVD *Live at the Purple Onion* (Shout! Factory), the piano-playing comic doesn't commit to either highbrow or lowbrow humor. It's reassuring when a comic can make an intelligent reference one minute and let out an epic belch the next. RANDY HARWARD

NEIL HAMBURGER

R.I.P. (1967-2007)

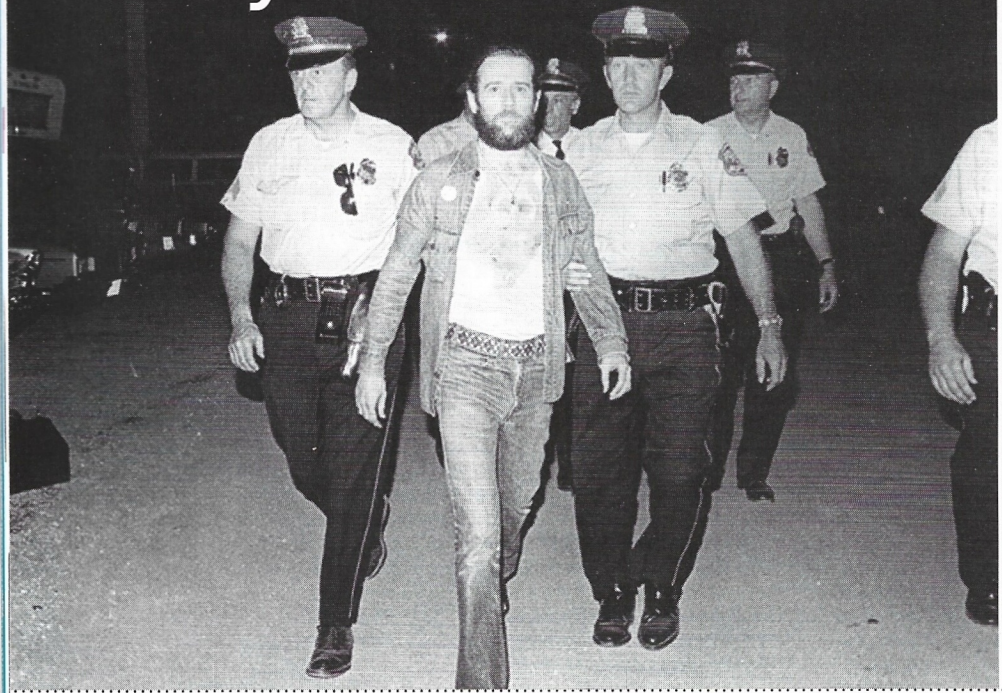
JAMES MCLENNAN

Neil Hamburger, comedian mediocre, was remembered Thursday at Di Presa's Pizza House, a room he so valiantly tried to win over for years, playing for free pies and all the liquor he could spill, as a true pioneer of cum jokes and as the most borderline humorist of his time. *USA Today* reported the scene at the pizza house as "uneventful" and "a non-story, as far as we're concerned." The paper also mentioned in a microscopic blurb that the lone pallbearer—bushy and cultish multi-hyphenate Will Oldham—"stood near the stage, which doubled as a coat closet in the winter months, solemn and muttering to himself that Alpo was all that would come out of Madonna's breasts and that Michael Jackson wasn't at all attracted to obese children. We assume those are what passed for the greasy Hamburger's punchlines. May he rest in obscurity—forever unable to split sides."

Hamburger died last week at a truck stop pay phone in the middle of Indiana, in the middle of a rant about "the kids, all doped up on drugs," to an interviewer from a Missoula alt-weekly. SEAN MOELLER

How Radio Changed My Life

BY GEORGE CARLIN



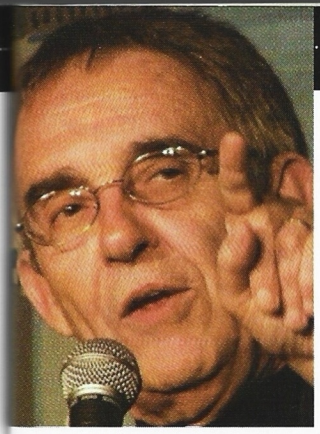
MY PLAN WAS TO GET into radio first, [because] the audience wouldn't be present and I could get confident. I had a nice tape recorder at home. They were very rare in the mid '50s, but my mother got me one and I used to do mock-radio shows and interviews and fake commercials and all that kind of stuff. I thought I was good at that and it would be a good way to get started in show business.

At that time they had a draft. In New York, the draft pool was very big, so they picked you much later... they picked 21-year-olds. I didn't want my fate to rest in their hands, so I joined the Air Force at 17 after quitting school. And I thought, well, I'll get out and I'll have the GI bill to go to school and learn to be a disc jockey.

Down in Shreveport, I ran into a guy in an amateur play that I was doing who had a disc jockey show, and I asked him to let me watch him. What I didn't know is that he also owned the radio station. It was a small "daytimer"—KJOE, 1480 AM, 1,000 watt, daytime-only station. Shreveport was a very hot radio market; nine stations, and it was very competitive. We were the leader. By the time I got there, [KJOE] had a 52-share, which is incredible.

After he got off the air, he asked me to read some news and commercial copy. He liked the way I was able to read and project my voice, so he gave me a weekend job reading newscasts only, weekends only. And then I worked my way into being a DJ.

Top 40 was only a couple of years old; not many markets had Top 40 stations. We're talking about stations that just played a single playlist, over and over. This was



Ron Shock

An outlaw returns

Ron Shock has been a student of the priesthood, car thief, member of a chain gang, jewel thief, prison inmate, vice president of a Fortune 500 company (McMillan Publishing), rock promoter, inventor with three patents in electronics ("One went on to become Quick Alert. I sold it for $15,000 and the guy I sold it to made millions. In financial circles, I'm called a fucking idiot") and, since the age of 40, comedian and storyteller.

His break came when Johnny Carson had him on the *Tonight Show* to do "Oral Roberts and the 900-foot Jesus," a gut-clenchingly funny skewering of the televangelist's legendary claim that a 900-foot tall Jesus told him to raise $8 million or he'd die. Thus began the only career Shock has maintained. Then based in Houston, Shock formed the Texas Outlaw Comics with his friends Riley Barber, Jimmy Pineapple, Andy Huggins, Steve Epstein and Bill Hicks—yeah, him. "There are about 60 people out there that claim to have been [Outlaws] but they're lying," Shock laughs.

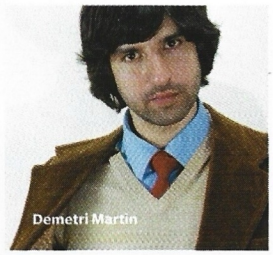
His blend of stand-up comedy and storytelling—imagine Hicks meets Will Rogers—made him a favorite at comedy clubs across the nation as fans clamored to hear "The Greatest Dope Story Ever Told" and homespun but hedonistic bits like "You're Gonna Die Anyway." He was a television favorite, appearing on *Evening at the Improv*, again on the *Tonight Show* and in his own Showtime special, *Bad Gig Blues*.

When his wife was in a devastating car accident in 1998, Shock quit comedy, abandoning a successful one-man show in L.A. to care for her. After her death in 2000, he moved to Vegas, playing poker and resuming his career onstage and online (RonShock.com). It wasn't the tough comeback it could've been.

"I'm unique," he says, both grateful and proud. "There isn't anybody out there that does what I do. Comedy clubs were still getting calls for me, [so] when I was ready to come back, it just took phone calls. People like what I do."

RANDY HARWARD

COMEDIANS YOU NEED TO KNOW



DEMETRI MARTIN

www.demetrimartin.com
YOU'D KNOW: *The Daily Show with Jon Stewart*, Comedy Central.
CHECK OUT: Martin's CD/DVD package *These Are Jokes* (Comedy Central Records) has the best of his pokerfaced absurdism.

MATT BESSER

www.mattbesser.com
YOU'D KNOW: Him as a member of the Upright Citizens Brigade and his fake debate show *Crossballs*.
CHECK OUT: Until Comedy Central gets its ass in gear and releases *Crossballs* on DVD, try Besser's all-incoming prank call CD *May I Help You, Dumbass?*.

LOUIS C.K.

www.louisck.com
YOU'D KNOW: HBO's *Lucky Louie*; 2001 Blaxploitation spoof *Pootie Tang*.
CHECK OUT: His stand-up is ace, but *Lucky Louie* is pure puerile genius. Get the DVDs, 'cause HBO fucked up and canceled it.

JIM NORTON

www.eatabullet.com
YOU'D KNOW: He was the foul-mouthed degenerate Rich on *Lucky Louie*; Opie and Anthony co-host.
CHECK OUT: Essays book *Happy Endings: Tales of a Meaty-Breasted Zilch* (Simon Spotlight).

DAVE ATTELL

www.daveattell.com
YOU'D KNOW: Attell hosted Comedy Central's late-night travelogue *Insomniac*.
CHECK OUT: *Skanks for the Memories* (Comedy Central Records) is a smorgasbord of perversion and sick twists.

MITCH HEDBERG

www.mitchhedberg.net
YOU'D KNOW: The late (1968-2005) king of the sleepy-stoned one-liner was all over Comedy Central.
CHECK OUT: Anything you can find, especially *Strategic Grill Locations* and *Mitch All Together* (Comedy Central Records).

JON BENJAMIN

www.midnightpajamajam.com
YOU'D KNOW: The animated series *Home Movies* and *Freak Show*; Jimmy Kimmel.
CHECK OUT: Voice work is his forte, so try Adult Swim's *Lucy: Daughter of the Devil* when it debuts September 9.

JON GLASER

www.midnightpajamajam.com
YOU'D KNOW: Adult Swim's *Stroker and Hoop*; Jimmy Kimmel.
CHECK OUT: On compilation *Invite Them Up* (Comedy Central Records), Glaser deadpans a letter from his father to his former bandmates in... ZZ Top.

TIM AND ERIC

www.timanderic.com
YOU'D KNOW: Adult Swim's animated *Tom Goes to the Mayor*; surreal sketch show *Tim and Eric Awesome Show, Great Job!*.
CHECK OUT: The *Tom* DVD or the self-produced *Ultimate Collection* DVD.

MIKE BIRBIGLIA

www.birbigs.com
YOU'D KNOW: The affable, understatedly intelligent and goofy comic from his Comedy Central and *The Bob and Tom Show*.
CHECK OUT: *Two-Drink Mike* (Comedy Central Records).

TODD BARRY

www.toddbarry.com
YOU'D KNOW: His drowsy voice from *Home Movies*, *Dr. Katz, Professional Therapist*, *Aqua Teen Hunger Force*
CHECK OUT: *Medium Energy* and *Falling Off the Bone* (Comedy Central Records) are sedately hilarious.

HARLAND WILLIAMS

www.harlandwilliams.com
YOU'D KNOW: Him as the stoner kindergarten teacher from *Half Baked*.
CHECK OUT: *Har-larious!* (Comedy Central Records), one of the strangest and funniest comedy albums ever.

proving to be a big thing in the '50s, and we were in on the ground floor. Rock 'n' roll was just getting started. The year that I went there, Elvis Presley's "Heartbreak Hotel" was the hit. It was just the beginning of the white people taking over the black people's music.

See, I grew up in Harlem. I grew up with real rhythm-and-blues, not that stuff by the McGuire Sisters and the Crew-Cuts and all of these fake, white groups that covered the black hits. I hated when the whites took over the music. I didn't really enjoy this rock 'n' roll as much as some of the kids I was playing it for. I just had that little cultural divide, where I was more of a black-music person and I was playing this hybrid of black music and country that came to be called rock 'n' roll.

Now, again, not passing judgment on rock 'n' roll, 'cause [it] came to be a philosophy beyond just a certain way of having the beats in a measure of music arranged. So I am definitely a rock 'n' roll person when it comes to that. I understood why the kids liked it, I loved playing it 'cause it was energetic and exciting, but I wasn't a fan. I would go back and pick out other things.

We had a playlist, but it was not rigid. You didn't get punished if you played something you liked; you could do what you wanted. We were allowed to develop a little bit of patter and an on-the-air personality. I called it "Carlin's Corner" for a while.

[Now] I don't seek out music. I have about 26,000 songs in my iTunes library that are actually from my CD collection and a few things I bought and stuff that I remembered from when I did all my cocaine in the '70s and I got into a lot of music. I realized the sheer volume of stuff that was coming out and the fragmentation, that fact that there's "acid techno," "adult urban hip-," you know, these *fuckin' categories*, these cross-breedings... I'm the kinda person that—I don't wanna just be a dabbler, so I pull back. It's like when I was a kid and I started collecting stamps and I realized immediately: I'm never gonna have all the stamps I want. *Fuck* this; this is stupid. I like to feel like I can at least get my arms around something and have a good solid understanding of it. But the changes [in music] were coming too fast, and they were too numerous.

There is a thing about the music of your *own generation*.

This year George Carlin celebrates 50 years in comedy with the release of the 14-DVD set All My Stuff *(MPI Home Video), which collects his twelve HBO specials as well as a bonus disc with a 75-minute biographical* interview.

Beat of the Earth

Saturday Night Live 's FRED ARMISEN traces the history of things we like to beat.

DRUMS. THEY ARE A PART OF everyone's life. Ask any 10-year-old what Premier is and he or she will tell you, "That's a drum manufacturer that uses birch shells."

Drums have been part of humanity since the 10 A.D.'s. The notoriously violent Roman general Aetus was quoted as saying, "We should take a cylinder and stretch calf skin along one side of it and hit it with drumsticks." Another soldier replied, "What are drumsticks?" Aetus told him, "Why do you always get caught up in the minutiae of things? Let's focus on my drum idea."

The Romans flourished in drum production, and when they journeyed West to visit the Native Americans, they brought them as gifts. But the Arapajo tribe had instruments of their own, although they were not quite drums. "What are those?" the Romans asked. "Uh, nice to see you too. No hello, no nothing?" replied the Arapajo chieftans.

"Anyway, these are cymbals. We've been working on these for centuries. We've got crashes, rides, a 16-inch China crash." Instead of fighting, they agreed to put them together in a "Kittuus" or "kit" as we call them today. Fast forward to the classical music era. Vienna's small concert halls are teeming with young unknown composers like Strauss, Bach, Mahler and Beethoven. On any given night one could dance to Puccini and then go have a drink to the sounds of Handel. It was nuts. Timpani was the drum of choice for this music. There is no written history of how this came about. All we know is that they were nicknamed "Kettle Drums" by the town idiot. He was very much an idiot. Even though now we look back at people like that with a sort of quaintness, he was in reality super irritating and loud and just said stupid things that got no reaction. Anyway, he came up with Kettle Drums.

The next era in drumming was the Revolutionary War. Three musicians decided that they didn't want to take part in any killing so they would instead play music on the battlefield. One guy was on snare drum. The other was going to play the upright bass but that was so unwieldy that they barely got out of the barn. Then he made a joke that musicians still use today. He said, "Hahaha...I should have taken up the flute." They laughed politely but then realized it would be the easiest instrument to carry out in the field. It actually sounded kind of cool with just the snare drum. The third guy attempted to play a cornet. He was horrible. So they suggested he play a bass drum. Even worse. His timing was so off that even he was laughing. They even tried a thing were he would be a singer as they marched. Finally one of them said "John. Just carry an American flag. Seriously. We want you in the band, you're not there as far as musicianship goes, and it'll look cool. Okay?"

Then came the jazz era. Drummers everywhere loved the idea of playing pretentiously without a back beat and barely hitting the drums at all. They would put on their best suit and get paid to bust out a set of brushes to swish along to the music. Brushes! Audiences said, "This is a waste of time. Play those drums or we are moving on to rock 'n' roll."

And here we are today. Rock drummers are so well known, you don't even have to say their last names. Names like Glenn (Kotche), Clem (Burke) and Jonny (Quinn).

We never truly got to thank the Romans. They didn't live long enough because medicine at the time wasn't advanced enough. But their drums were. Thank you, General Aetus.

NBC/MARY ELLEN MATTHEWS

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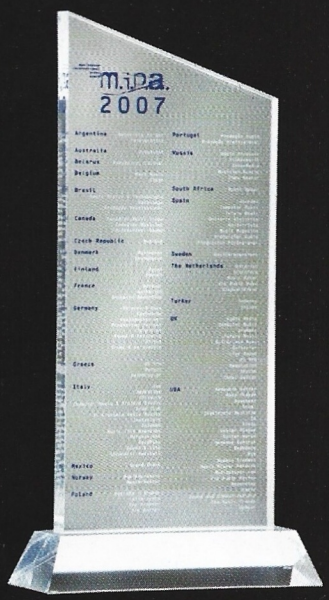

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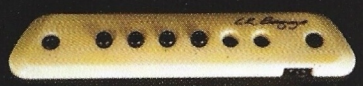

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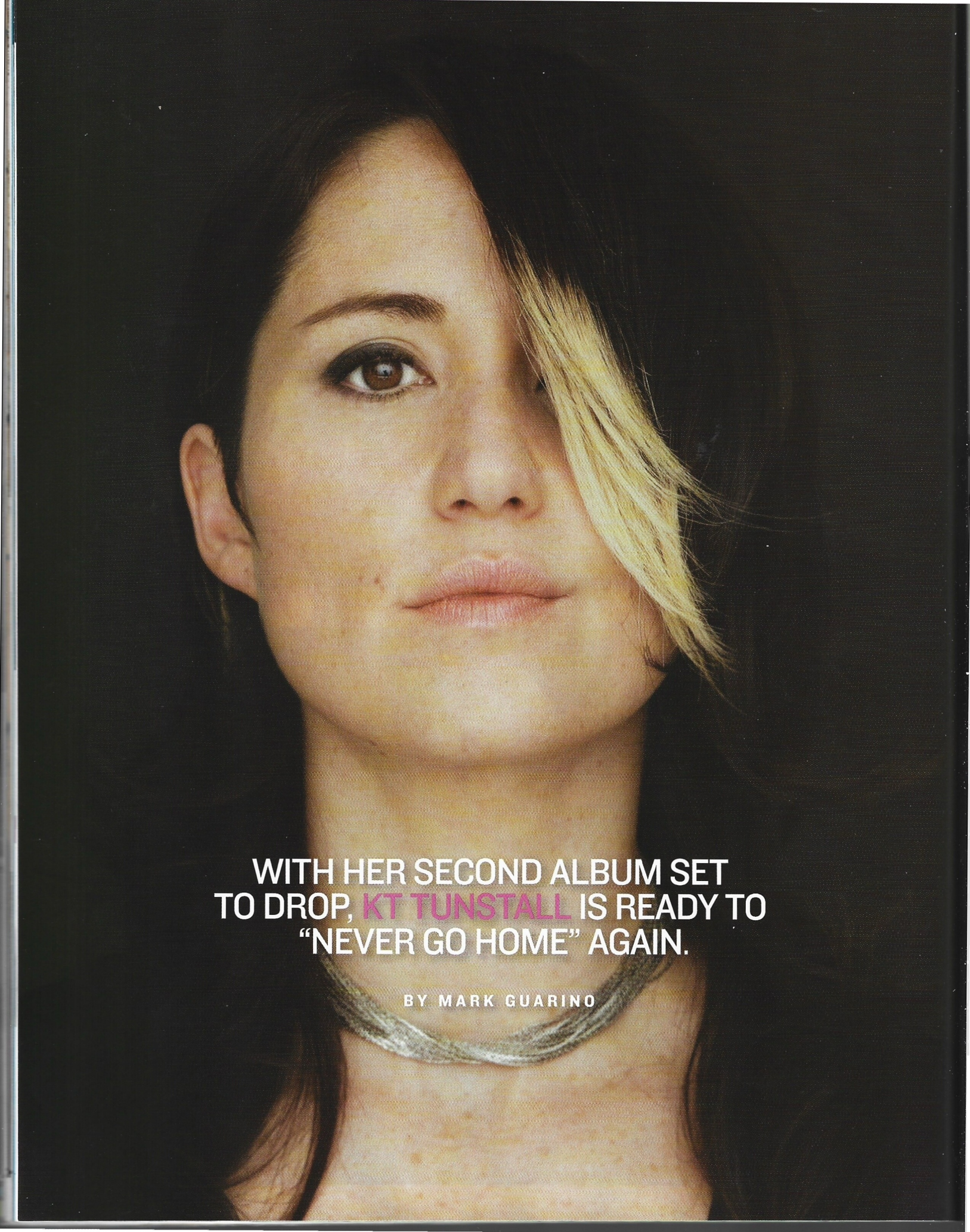


WITH HER SECOND ALBUM SET TO DROP, KT TUNSTALL IS READY TO "NEVER GO HOME" AGAIN.

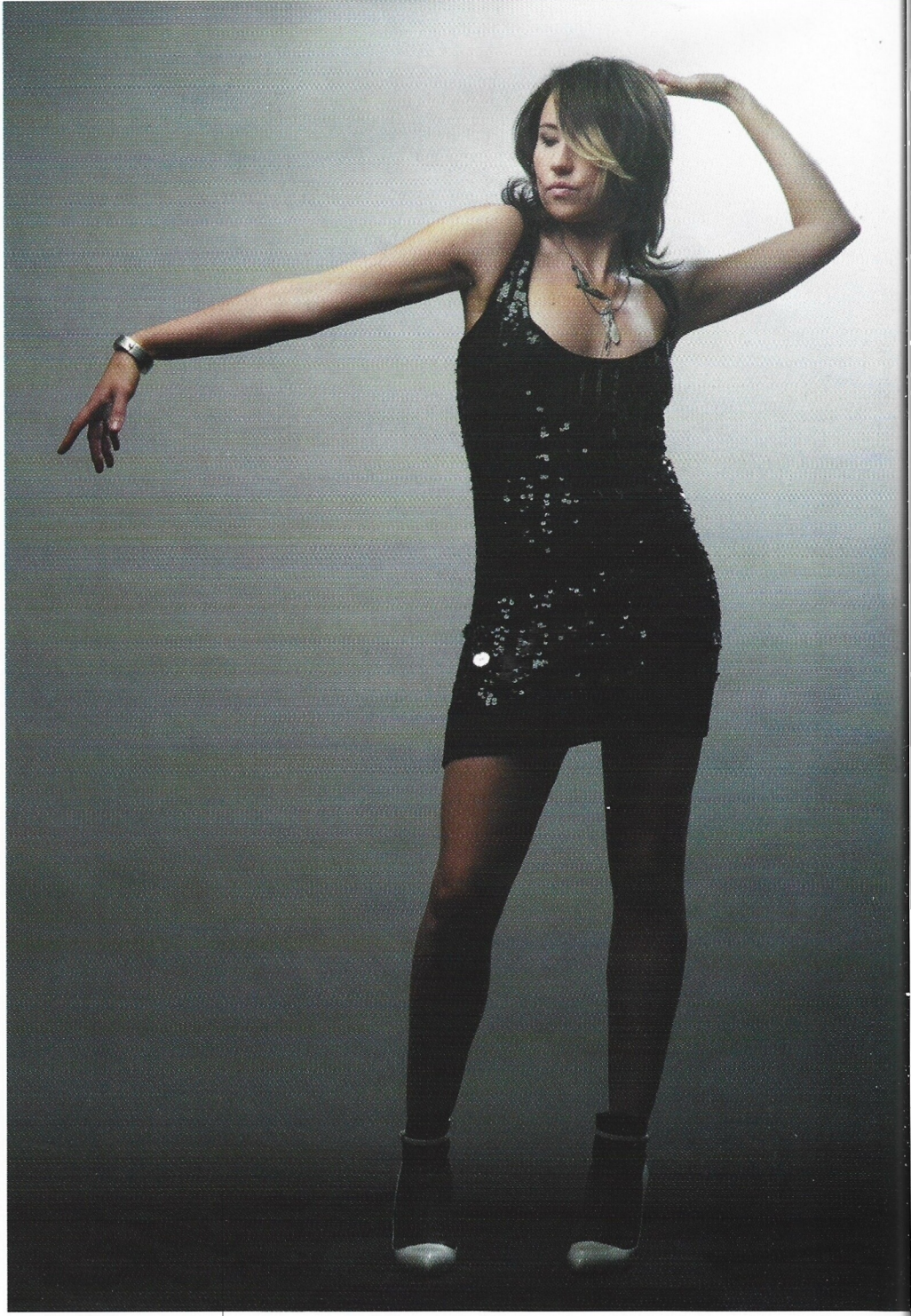
BY MARK GUARINO

KATIE

PHOTOS BY CHRISTOPHER MCCLALLEN

Dress by Daryl K
Boots by Cesare Paciotti
Bracelet by Bing Bang

STYLIST – KATIE GIESSLER
ASSISTANT STYLIST – MARA CARIZZO



HIGH ON THE LIST OF THINGS YOU DID NOT KNOW ABOUT KT TUNSTALL:

She is a Deadhead.

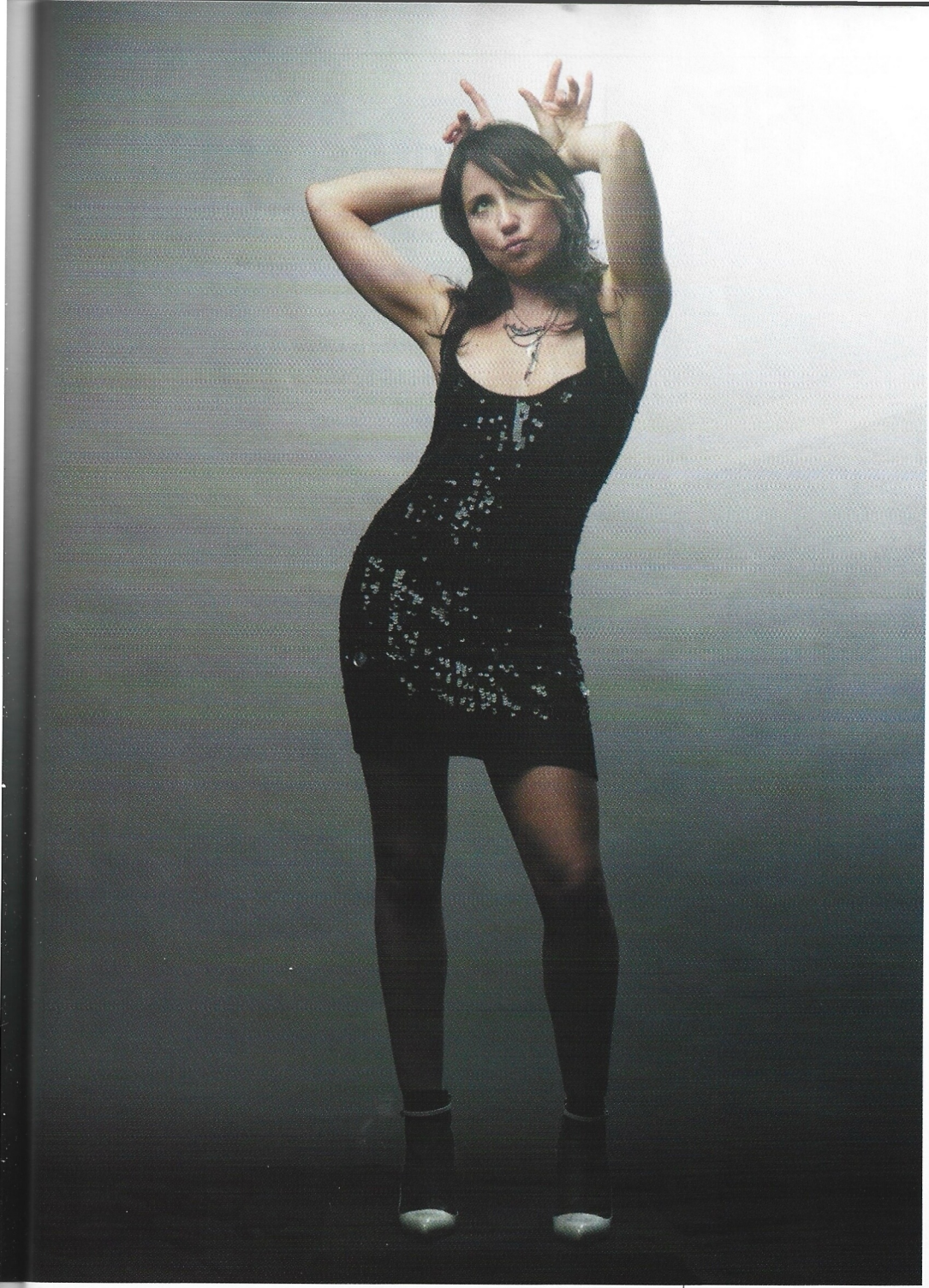
Blame Vermont. Tunstall was 17 when she left St. Andrews and her "little provincial house by the sea" and arrived in Connecticut to spend her senior year at Kent School, a boarding school full of "full-time pot smokers." She soon met friends who introduced their new European friend to the secret garden of American jam bands. She obsessed over this new music. She learned a popular band named Phish lived one state away. She formed her first band and called it the Happy Campers, a name chosen because she refused to call it THC.

On spring break, Tunstall bee-lined to Burlington, Vt. and "met a hippie friend and totally fell in love." They moved in with his family. His mother was a woman Ralph Nader might break out in a cold sweat for: She built her own house in the mountains, she ran it with an electric generator, and she lived by the belief that "it was really uncool to have new stuff."

Tunstall stayed in the United States a bit after graduation to contemplate this unusual subculture that she was certain didn't exist back home. That summer she went to Chicago and made friends with a local graffiti artist who took her on bike tours of the city. She attended the second-to-last Grateful Dead show at Soldier Field where she witnessed frustrated Chicago cops ordering Deadheads to unload their containers of nitrous oxide. Considering that Jerry Garcia would die one month later, the moment was sweet and innocent: People dancing in a circle, trying to breathe in the uncorked gas with everyone — police and hippie — getting very high and talking very funny.

"It was a lifestyle thing that hadn't occurred to me. People gave up jobs and played in bands and didn't get on the ladder. It really resonated with me," she says. "It never really left, honestly."

Seventeen years later, Tunstall is still trucking. *Eye to the Telescope*, her debut album of glossy folk pop, sold over a million copies in the United States alone. Following a fluke appearance on a British television show, she was soon plucked from obscurity, awarded a record contract and sent on an unwieldy trail of media appearances and touring stops across the world. Which was not without its curious left turns. Like when Hillary Clinton was considering using Tunstall's song "Suddenly I See" as her campaign theme (Céline Dion won the honors), or when Katherine McPhee chose to sing "Black Horse and the Cherry Tree," Tunstall's brisk country blues hit, on *American Idol*.



Dress by Sass and Bide; Boots by Cesare Paciotti ; Seamonster Necklace by Erica Weiner
Leaf Cluster Necklace by Bing Bang; Vintage Bracelet courtesy of Albright Fashion Library

"A beautiful moment of irony," Tunstall remembers today. "I got an e-mail and said, 'Oh my god, this is a nightmare.' I am never polite about *Pop Idol* [the British version of *American Idol*] shows. I hate them."

She considers *Telescope* a baptism by fire, a process that paved the way for *Drastic Fantastic*, her latest. It is a more assured album, with mellower songs that dare to avoid easy answers. There are pop songs with breakout choruses that can fill entire sports stadiums ("I Don't Want You Now," "Little Favours") and others of ragged popcraft like "Hold On"—a natural bookend to "Cherry Tree"—that keeps her inner hippie lit.

There is also the unexpected: Tunstall's more experimental side channeled both through quiet but illuminating chamber pop ("Paper Aeroplane," "Beauty of Uncertainty") and dense, fuzz rockers ("Funnyman"). Three years ago, Tunstall's brooding, tough vocals seemed like a strange match; on these songs they sound perfectly aligned to the songs.

"My spirit has been fortified, my whiskey has aged," she says. "I think a lot of it has to do with confidence on many levels. I didn't need that album to sell four million copies, that wasn't really a plan, I just needed to get the music out. What that massive success has afforded me is confidence. I feel really brave. That is always good for making music."

Life helped. Tunstall is adopted and was raised by a pair of academics, a mother who teaches primary school and a father who is a university professor of physics. The daughter they adopted was partially Chinese and they "used it as a creative ticket," she says, especially since her ethnic features were seldom seen in their remote part of Scotland.

"It was something they used to make me feel very special. They would say, 'You have different blood in you.' They used it in a way that was mysterious and exciting."

She felt no connection to her heritage until she viewed the Mike Leigh film *Secrets and Lies*, his 1996 Cannes winner about a black woman who seeks out her biological mother, who is white. Tunstall found her mother, learned about her ancestry, and enjoys the relationship they share today. "I didn't want to get into my forties and find they passed over me," Tunstall, 32, says. Unfortunately, the search ended up short for her father. "He disappeared," she adds.

Tunstall realizes that returning to the media spotlight to promote a new album in 2007 is much different than it was in 2004. She is releasing an album in the midst of an explosion of brash new British singers like Amy Winehouse and Lily Allen, artists whose tabloid presence is almost as significant as the music they make. Although she says she's a fan of both, she points out the obvious differences: "They're 10 years younger than me. They also make loads of effort to wear fancy clothes."

For her new album, she has simply one goal. It connects, not just to her days busking on the Burlington mall, but to her childhood when her parents took her and her brother on long camping adventures, giving her an appreciation of what it's like to be a nomad where life is taken one day at a time and something new is always around the corner.

In the world of music, it looks like this: "Get on a bus, Bob Dylan-style, and never go home." **H**

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"His strengths lie in his songcraft. From the rhythmic, marimba-driven "Walk On" to the slow swing of "The Wind," Harris' songs demonstrate a devotion to concise melodies and song forms that leave little to waste." - Michael Katzif, **NPR**

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"Australia's The Cat Empire rules ... this energetic Melbourne six-piece combo hits the states with *Two Shoes*, a magnetic amalgam of funk, soul, ska and frat-party raucousness." - Chris Strauss, *People*

"A genuine, organic musical phenomenon" - J. Perry, *The Boston Globe*

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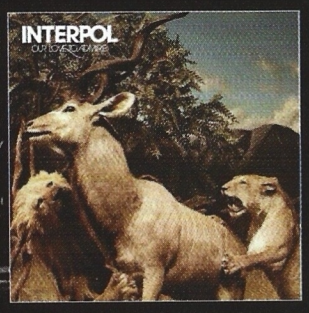

SWEET SAD MUSIC

Interpol pulls more punches and heartstrings on *Our Love to Admire*.

JELLE WAGENAAR

INTERPOL
OUR LOVE TO ADMIRE
(CAPITOL) www.capitolrecords.com

The biggest change Interpol has undergone since it dropped *Turn On the Bright Lights*, its hype-worthy Matador debut from 2002, isn't bassist Carlos D.'s choice of neckwear. It isn't even his band's sound. No, the disparity lies in how popular Interpol has gotten. Where it once polarized record-shop clerks into those who lauded its stormy, intensely stylized post-punk and those who accused it of aping Joy Division, Interpol now appeals to a section of the population who wouldn't know Ian Curtis from Sir Ian McKellen. It's on Capitol, touring the hippest, hugest festivals, getting spun by Clear Channel jocks, and, most surprisingly, playing only a slight variation of the cryptic, emotionally taut music it gigged with at Brownies.

On *Our Love to Admire*, the band's major-label debut, it continues to bring the pain—real or imagined, lyrically and sonically. Even when this band rocks, such as on "Mammoth," "All Fired Up" or the addictive first single "The Heinrich Maneuver," it doesn't *rock out*. The tunes are urgent and kinetic, melancholy and bittersweet, but never fun; if this music were part of a film score, the scene in question might anticipate some heinous crime of passion. All that manufactured doom and gloom make for monotony and a difficult end-to-end listen, but the best moments have a narcotic pull that even Paul Banks' robotic monotone can't undercut.

Compositionally, the album uses the rigid, nuts-and-bolts palette of 2004's *Antics*, with the impressionism of *Bright Lights* cropping up on the closing sadcore misfire "The Lighthouse." Production-wise, songs like "No I in Threesome" point to the glossiest commercial post-

Interpol

JELLE WAGENAAR

punk (Psychedelic Furs, Echo & the Bunnymen). The instrumentation is expanded with taste (check the positively ghoulish melodica on "Pioneer to the Falls"), and lyrically the album totes Banks' usual mixed bag—compelling but sometimes miring in silliness. On "No I in Threesome," that goofy phrase undermines an otherwise outstanding track. With Banks' inflectionless moan and the band's usual macabre backing, you're unable to decide whether he's being cute, ironic or what.

When things snap into place and the group plays it straight, though, as on depressed-pop barnburners like "Pioneer to the Falls," "Heinrich," or "Rest My Chemistry," few current artists convey high-style-rich-boy joys and pains with the romantic tact of this band. Forget Joy Division; Interpol is headed into the stark theatrical grandeur of Depeche Mode, replete with wispy bangs, designer aviators and Europe's full endorsement. It's sad for sad's sake, and the kids are into it. EVAN HAGA

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Three of *Our Love to Admire's* standout tracks:

"PIONEER TO THE FALLS"

Interpol doesn't crash the gates in its albums; it opens with atmosphere and foreshadows the impending melancholy. "Pioneer" begins as a few clouds and turns into a thunderstorm, with a heartbreakingly melodic bridge that's worth *at least* 99 cents.

"THE HEINRICH MANEUVER"

Yes, this first single recalls "Slow Hands," *Antics'* first, but "Heinrich" is better. Neither the staggered guitar interplay nor the fevered tempo can obscure the razor-sharp pop hooks in this tale of a knotty cross-coastal love.

"REST MY CHEMISTRY"

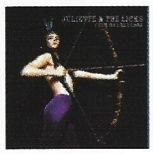
If *Our Love* is less consistent than the other LPs, then at least it holds the band's best song yet. Wedged between skippable tracks, "Rest My Chemistry" is the easy-to-miss banger that "C'mere" was for *Antics*. But where that song galloped, "Chemistry" trudges: "I haven't slept for two days/I've bathed in nothing but sweat," sings Banks. Being the toast of the international hipster club scene is a blessing and a curse. EVAN HAGA

JULIETTE AND THE LICKS

FOUR ON THE FLOOR

(MILITIA GROUP) www.themilitiagroup.com

The new streetwalkin' cheetah



On *Four on the Floor*, the actress and her band bypass the head and aim squarely for the gut and groin. Lewis plays it like a big, dumb rocker—that's meant as a compliment, by the way—and we don't mean dumb in the sense that the Chris Daughtrys of the world are dumb rockers. Lewis gives the impression that she knows rock 'n' roll is dumb with a wink, a smirk and a nudge, singing lyrics as deep as a glass of water: she's a ravenous cheetah one moment, dead meat the next. And the music, featuring the gonzo drumming of guest Dave Grohl, is equally raw. The disc's best track, an L7-meets-Iggy-Pop sex bomb titled "Hot Kiss," may be the coolest/dumbest song of the year—and for that reason alone, the album's brilliant. JAKE CLINE

ANGELS OF LIGHT

WE ARE HIM

(YOUNG GOD) www.younggodrecords.com

Michael Gira's world still burns

With *Angels of Light Sing Other People*, ex-Swans' Michael Gira set some rules: no drums, no extended instrumental breaks, and no bombast. Now, in his fifth Angels full-length, Gira has, thankfully, tossed out the playbook, disavowed minimalism, and invited everybody he knows. *We Are Him* exults in excess, swaggers with rhythm, dizzies with density, and stands as Gira's best effort since Swans. Akron/Family returns as backing band—you can sense their positive

Buffalo Tom

space-hippie vibe most strongly in "The Man We Left Behind"—and there are a whole gaggle of other contributors, including former Swans Christopher Hahn and Bill Rieflin, Eszter Balint, David Garland and others. But frequently it's just Gira pulling noise, drone and blues-bent call-and-response together, such as in the title track and the exultant "Black River Blues." Not since *Everything Is Good Here* has Gira worked on such a large scale, and even then, it didn't pay off like this. JENNIFER KELLY

HARLAN T. BOBO

I'M YOUR MAN

(GONER) www.goner-records.com

Southern Gothic rival to Nick Cave

If you're expecting to hear reckless, trash-rock synonymous with the Memphis-based Goner imprint, look elsewhere. The mysteriously eclectic Harlan T. Bobo, a soul-wrenching transplant and ex-junkie singer-songwriter, absorbs the complex songwriting nomenclature of storytellers Chilton, Cohen and Reed like a thirsty sponge left under the sink. His feral and insightful songwriting is razor-sharp and confrontational and his strong baritone falls between Cohen's and Mark Eitzel's.

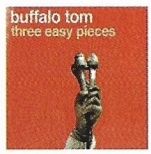
Bobo sermonizes like an understanding preacher on "My Life," a chicken-fried testimonial where the Oblivians meet the Box Tops at Café Flesh as nubile schoolgirls blush and sizzling Jay Reatard-inspired guitar runs blaze a path of sin. Bobo confirms unofficial honors as American rival to Nick Cave on "Sick of It," a Southern Gothic distorto-blues rock stomp where tortured souls seek salvation from the pages of George Jones' autobiography. Paralleling the diverse traditions of Memphis pop/soul/R&B, Bobo exposes a uniquely transcendent voice which narrows the cultural divide and deserves universal recognition. RON BALLY

BUFFALO TOM

THREE EASY PIECES

(NEW WEST/AMMAL) www.newwestrecords.com

Beantown boys still blessed and boffo



Mystery solved! Buffalo Tom is just another word for tenacious. Formed back two decades ago (ouch!), this Boston trio remains the standard bearer for bands who've had all the bad luck that life and the music business can throw at them and yet just flat refuse to be licked.

Nine years after its last album, it's back again with yet another example of why it's always been tagged as the little band that should. Blessed with two singer/songwriters, bassist Chris Colbourn and guitarist Bill Janovitz, it rips through a lucky 13 bag that includes all the classic Buff

LIZ LINDER

Tom modes: aching love songs ("You'll Never Catch Him"), full throttle fuzz guitar pop anthems ("Bottom of the Rain") and something a little rawer and more akin to its punk-rock roots, "Good Girl," which repeats the line, "Maybe I could be someone this time" with a fierce, unmistakable determination. Forget the "should"—this is the little band that *does*. ROBERT BAIRD

CLARE BURSON

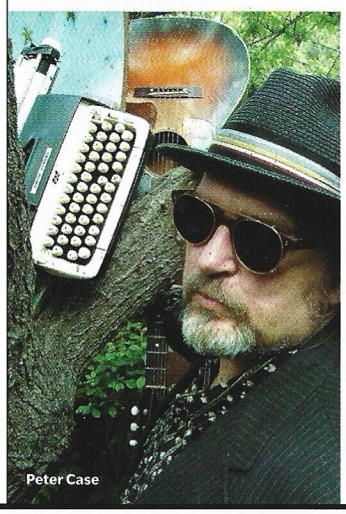
THIEVES

(SELF-RELEASED) www.clareburson.com

A magnificent lily in mid-flowering

"I remember the time/When love was what it seemed," sighs Brooklyn-based Clare Burson, on the title track of her second long-player, and cocooned amid a lush, noirish arrangement for creaky keyboards and droning guitars, her ennui and regret is palpable. Hers is a knowing voice, world-weary like Lucinda Williams', expressive like Kathleen Edwards', mysterious like Jolie Holland's. And produced by Nashville studio wizard Fognode (Brian Siskind), Burson traverses the whole emotional spectrum on this remarkable album—the tentative joy of liberation (cinematic opener "Boat of Leaves"), the impossible lightness of metaphysical reverie (cosmic cowgirl twanger "Angels"), the endorphin rush of expectation (thrumming anthem "1000 Miles"). She even finds time to step back and put a fresh spin on Nancy Sinatra's sassy classic "These Boots Are Made for Walkin'," this time recasting it as an ancient murder ballad for banjo.

Nowadays the Americana genre is awash in over-hyped/under-developed singer-songwriters, so it's doubly refreshing to encounter a talent such as Burson who seemingly arrives fully-formed. (Living in Nashville during 2001-05, she moved among a group of songwriters that included John Prine, Matthew Ryan, Lucinda Williams and Patty Griffin, an invaluable internship by any measure.) *Thieves* is the sound of a magnificent lily caught in mid-flowering, its rich scent already piercing the air. FRED MILLS


Peter Case

DENISE SULLIVAN

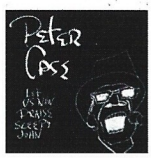
Clare Burson

PETER CASE

LET US NOW PRAISE SLEEPY JOHN

(YEP ROC) www.yeproc.com

Stripped-down and well-seasoned



It's been a not-uncommon event for the more, um, *seasoned* survivors of the early '80s L.A. underground scene to be seen dabbling in acoustic-tinged Americana. Peter Case has probably been doing it longer than most, and therefore it's somewhat surprising that *Let Us Now Praise Sleepy John* is his first actual solo acoustic record. What's not surprising at all is that the album is so thoroughly engaging. Case's innate pop sensibilities show through, despite his best efforts to suppress them, but this is far from the sort of unplugged affair that many artists go for. Case hews close to his folk influences, so the most successful numbers on this stripped-down disc are the storyteller ones ("Million Dollars Bail," "I'm Gonna Change My Ways"). But even the more lyrically (and musically) straightforward tunes like "Every 24 Hours" (with guest Richard Thompson) are exponentially more substantial than the work being produced by any of Case's ex-punk roots-rocker contemporaries. JASON FERGUSON

KELLY CLARKSON

MY DECEMBER

(RCA) www.rcarecords.com

The winter of Clive Davis' discontent

When word went out Kelly Clarkson had gone dark on her third record and that poppa/doc Clive Davis had grown nervous from hearing zero hits, a kinky panic came over this reviewer. Had Clarkson turned a fabulously forlorn corner and become Ian Curtis? Had session bassist/punk Mike Watt dragged her to Pedro and made a Minutewoman of her? Had hearing Ted Leo destroy "Since U Been Gone" sent her over the edge? How savagely un-commercial would *My December* be?

For better and worse, it sounds just like a Kelly Clarkson record. Not as catchy as *Breakaway* but nothing as obtuse as Kelly or Clive'd have you believe. And had the exec and the *Idol* not run their collective mouths, I'm not sure listeners would've found fault with *December*, but would realize that it's a song-sung-blue-ish break-up record: *Blood on the Tracks* for the Hot Topic set. Like pop-rocker girls Avril Lavigne and Pink, Clarkson's expanded her production a bit beyond Max Martin's gloss. Producer David Kahne's helmed the Bangles and the Outfield, not Sunn0))); it's not as if he's made Clarkson into a death-sludge singer. Throughout this winter of discontent, Clarkson's sharp nuanced baritone and her occasional high kicks and sarcasm-driven sneers negotiate the awkwardness of a relationship gone south handily: the nattering cheat of "Never Again" and "Judas"; the ruminative emptiness of "Hole." Clarkson slows down and cold for "Sober," down and warmly acoustic on the tender "Irvine," and speeds moodily though the electro-blip of "How I Feel" and the electro-clipped "One Minute."

Not quite bold, certainly not brutal, *December* shows growth that neither its maker nor marketer should worry about too much. A.D. AMOROSI

STEVE EARLE

WASHINGTON SQUARE SERENADE

(NEW WEST) www.newwestrecords.com

Mainlining that digital twang

When word got out that Steve Earle's latest would be mostly acoustic and folky, devotees of the man's hardcore troubadour side may have taken pause. No worries, kids; *Washington Square Serenade*, while true to its Greenwich Village roots does conjure ghosts of folk past (from Dylan to Van Ronk—notably the talking blues "Down Here Below," a wistful, melodic delight namechecking assorted NYC landmarks), hews closer to the organic twang stew of 1997's *El Corazón* than the countrygrass of 1995's *Train a Comin'*.

In fact, some of *WSS*'s best tracks recall *EC*: "Jericho Road," one of several tunes rife with Biblical imagery, has echoes of "Telephone Road," and "Days Aren't Long Enough," a duet with Allison Moorer, is both a sonic and thematic heir to "Poison Lovers"—here, the protagonists have siphoned the poison from the relationship and are utterly devoted to one another. And thanks to the beats-attentive production of Dust Brother John King, edginess courses through *WSS* like a mainline. Check the Celtic flavored "Oxycontin Blues," a chilling narrative of self-destruction set to a droning banjo/sitar motif, or Earle's haunting, swamp-soul cover of Tom Waits' "Way down in the Hole." This so-called "acoustic" record is, in the final estimation, downright *electrifying*. FRED MILLS

TED BARRON

GALACTIC

FROM THE CORNER TO THE BLOCK

(ANTI-) www.anti.com

Universe-sized hip-hop classic

Although it's primarily an instrumental band, some of Galactic's finest work featured vocalist Theryl DeClouet, who split in 2004.

The band has fared fine since, still working in funk and jazz (and sundry accent genres) to produce highly enjoyable, innovative instro music. But vocals feature prominently on Galactic's sixth, as the band enlists a who's-who of underground/conscious rappers (including Mr. Lif, Lateef the Truth Speaker, Lyrics Born, the Coup's Boots Riley, Jurassic 5's Chali 2na). It's no surprise; Galactic has long dosed their scientific funk with hip-hop, but the extent and effect is striking.

The band sets out to redefine the New Orleans sound and succeeds, simply by juxtaposing contemporary beats and aesthetics with the brassy, happy NOLA sound. But it's the rappers' contributions (most notably Lif and 2na, and excepting Juvenile's G-lite pap) of lyrics about street corners that makes *FTCTTB* such a singular musical achievement. Almost every tune is a hip-hop classic, welding vibrant storytelling, strong voices and agile wordplay to a rhythmic and melodic genius that is simply *galactic*. RANDY HARWARD

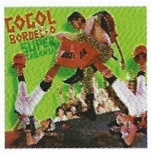
GogolBordello

GOGOL BORDELLO

SUPER TARANTA!

(SIDE ONE DUMMY) www.sideonedummy.com

Musical Hütz-pah



Whether Russian émigré Eugene Hütz belongs in a straight-jacket or a DJ booth is debatable but he's definitely a great bandleader. Like his DJ gigs, Hütz's group has no use for stylistic boundaries, crafting self-styled gypsy music, which he associates culturally and musically with punk. At his best, he welds old-world tradition with any modern raucous, over-the-top music that fits, just as Shane MacGowan did in the Pogues.

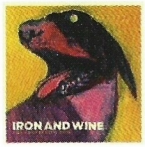
Not surprisingly, many of Hütz's songs are about carousing and cultural/identity problems. Lyrically, he's got no use for the "good old days" and cops his best line from Samuel Beckett concerning perseverance ("I can't go on, I will go on!"). Otherwise, when he and his merry band don't sound like gatecrashers at an Italian wedding ("Harem in Tuscany") or rowdy Rastas ("Tribal Connections"), they make like a bar mitzvah gone mad ("Ultimate," "Super Theory of Super Everything"). As such, his world-music party is boozy but poignant too. JASON GROSS

IRON & WINE

THE SHEPHERD'S DOG

(SUB POP) www.subpop.com

A full beard and a fuller sound



First it was lo- to hi-fi, then it was acoustic to electric; with each new Iron & Wine record Sam Beam has shed a layer of intimacy. Here, on his third full-length, his sound, much like his signature beard, has gotten fuller. A kaleidoscopic array of instruments and feedback augment *The Shepherd's Dog*, but it is still Beam's pacifying croon that garners the most attention. "Lovesong of the Buzzard" is an upbeat, bluesy cut luxurious in warm organ swells. "Innocent Bones" boasts staccato guitar and a cascading banjo while Beam laments, "It was always the broken hand we learned to lean on after all."

Even with lush arrangements, the most powerful moments find Beam at his most intimate. The melancholic and defiant "Resurrection Fern" sings of "the babies' breath, our bravery wasted and our shame" over a weeping pedal steel, and "Flightless Bird, American Mouth" is the type of heartbreaking waltz with which Iron & Wine has become synonymous. Combine budding musicality with Beam's stirring sentimentality and the result is the best Iron & Wine record to date. NICHOLAS BREUL

TALIB KWELI

EAR DRUM

(BLACKSMITH) www.blacksmithnyc.com

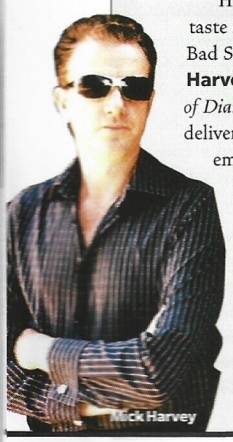
Man with an opinion—and a plan

If all rappers were as socially aware as Talib Kweli, maybe the world of hip-hop wouldn't need records like *Ear Drum*. Released on Kweli's own

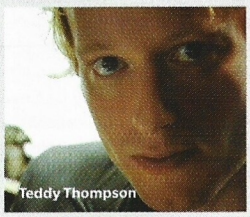
UNDER COVER(S)

HARP takes on the song recycling industry

IN OUR JULY issue's "Someone Else's Songs" story we proposed that cover tunes, once a sign of artistic bankruptcy for "serious" musicians, nowadays seem to have gone legit thanks to hipsters like Yo La Tengo, Cat Power and Howe Gelb. Revisionist bastards that we are, we reopen the debate—Rock, Rot or Rule?


Mick Harvey

Having exquisite taste in tunes is the Bad Seeds' **Mick Harvey**, who on *Two of Diamonds* (Mute) delivers a brace of emotionally riveting treatments that include PJ Harvey (the darkly droning "Slow-Motion-Movie-Star") and Bill Withers (an ominous, noir-rock take of "I Don't Want You On My Mind") as well as obscure-but-potent material from fellow Australians the Saints, Triffids and Loved Ones. *Rule!* The Mavericks' **Raul Malo**, likewise, illuminates his erudite, sophisticated side on *After Hours* (New Door/UMe) by tackling country standards by Hank Williams, Buck Owens, Roger Miller, Kris Kristofferson and others. There's a fine line between swoon and snooze, however, and these lounge/big band arrangements are stuffed into tuxes a few sizes too small. *Rot!* Malo should take a cue from **Teddy Thompson**, whose *Up Front and Down Low* (Verve Forecast) collection of country classics strikes a good balance by swinging between traditional guitar/pedal steel arrangements (such as on Ernest Tubb's "Walking


Teddy Thompson

Shivaree

the Floor Over You") and lusher string orchestrations (George Jones' "She Thinks I Still Care," with an enticing baroque vibe). *Rock!*

It's hard to say exactly what **Shivaree** (a/k/a Ambrosia Parsley) was aiming for when she cut *Tainted Love: Mating Calls and Fight Songs* (Zoë/Rounder), but the result ain't exactly "a sexy swing through the classic American Songbook of Love & Devotion" (as press materials trumpet). A glammed up version of Rick James' "Cold Blooded" and a folk-pop reworking of Mötley Crüe's "Looks That Kill" offer some intermittently kitschy fun, but I think you'll understand what I'm getting at when I say there's something downright creepy about a set featuring songs penned by R. Kelly, Michael Jackson and Gary Glitter. *Rot!* **Marc Broussard**, on the other hand, nails it on *S.O.S.: Save Our Soul* (Vanguard), a sexy swing through the songbooks of Stevie Wonder, Marvin Gaye, Allen Toussaint, Otis Redding and more. Broussard has the pipes to match some seriously righteous grooves—when you hear him ease into Al Green's "Love and Happiness," his blue-eyed soul will make you a believer. *Rock!*

Speaking of believing, does anyone not genuflect before **Hayseed Dixie**'s metal-to-bluegrass aesthetic? You won't find any AC/DC tunes on *Weapons of Grass Destruction* (Cooking Vinyl), but rivet-heads'll cheer the inclusion of Judas Priest, Status Quo, Alice Cooper and the band voted most

Hayseed Dixie

likely *never* to see its name in the same sentence as "bluegrass" or "country," Turbonegro. There are also covers of the Beatles and the Stones, but you know what? Any monkey with a plectrum can do Beatles and Stones. It takes real men, true avatars of *homo sapiens*-hood, to attempt Turbonegro. That Hayseed Dixie selected the Norwegian outfit's timeless, tender anthem "I Got Erection" proves my point. *Rule*, baby! FRED MILLS

Liars

label, Blacksmith Records, at its finest it is a hard-driven, scathing look at black culture teeming with messages of redemption ("Hostile Gospel, Pt. 1"), advice on making better music ("More or Less"), even eating better ("Eat to Live"). Kweli sets his fast-paced rhymes to classic, jazz-influenced beats tinged with '70s soul and backed by old-school hip hop arrangements. Featuring numerous cameos by fellow rappers, a track with Norah Jones' smoky-smooth vocals ("Soon the New Day"), and production by Kanye West, the Black Eyed Peas, will.i.am and Hi-Tek, *Ear Drum* is about as musically accessible as a hip-hop record gets, a cohesive, lyric heavy journey through urban America. Kweli is certainly a man with an opinion. And he's not afraid to let it be heard. ALLIE GOOLRICK.

LIARS

LIARS

(MUTE) www.mute.com

Like a locomotive on fire

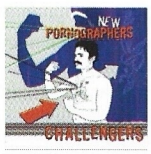
Liars have been wandering for years, submerging themselves in the distorted murk of *They Were Wrong, So We Drowned*, then exploring Kraut-drone-y echo-chambers in last year's *Drum's Not Dead*. Now with their fourth full-length, it finally becomes apparent where all the experiments were leading. Their most varied and style-jumping work ever, the disc flirts with trip hop, Beck-ian shuffles, fuzz-pedal psyche and even, near the end, radiant pop. "Freak Out" is pure distorted guitar bliss, and with "Protection," the band has a go at a wistful, reverb drenched summer melody. Still, it's the opening salvo, "Plaster Casts of Everything," that sounds definitively Liars, its head-snapping drums joined with pounded keyboards and dizzying falsetto vocals. Headlong, heedless, rolling downhill like a locomotive on fire, the cut's unstoppably beat driven and as multilayered as anything on *Drum's*. Finally another Liars album not just to respect, but to love. JENNIFER KELLY

NEW PORNOGRAPHERS

CHALLENGERS

(MATADOR) www.matadorrecords.com

Sgt. Newman's lonely hearts club band



In the realm of indie pop, these Canadian transplants' only real competition nowadays are the Apples in Stereo (hitting a peak now) and the Shins (almost topping the charts). Their strength lies in their supergroup line-up, which includes Destroyer's Dan Bejar and golden-voiced singer Neko Case alongside leader/songwriter/now-Brooklyn-native AC Newman. Where they once balanced out their wrenching, doubtful romantic tales with giddy tunes over the course of their last record (2005's *Twin Cinema*), their downcast outlook has caught up with their music on this, their fourth album. But even in rueful mode, Newman can conjure up ultra-catchy songs on a mere whim (try "Mutiny, I Promise You"). Plus, he's got Case sweetening the tunes in the background or up front (the title track, "Go Places") and Bejar's occasional knottier material to alternate with (especially the elegiac closer "The Spirit of Giving"). Any lonely or broken hearts needing musical solace should take this for a spin. JASON GROSS

New Pornographers

HEAVY TRASH

GOING WAY OUT WITH HEAVY TRASH

(YEP ROC) www.yeproc.com

Baby baby baby baby *yeah, baby*!

Heavy Trash's sophomore release is slathered with enough reverb to shake down San Francisco and stuffed full of several varieties of their throwback 'billy with a modern touch and wink. It's brought to you by principals Jon Spencer and Matt Verta-Ray along with backup assistance picked up from a couple of different continents, mainly from Canadian omni-tonkers the Sadies. The lead-off track, "Pure Gold," sets a vintage tone—all snaky leads, hiccups, and slapback bass—that continues with "Kissy Baby" and the freight-train beat of "She Baby," and then veers off for some Rockpile-ish pub rock ("Outside Chance"), a bit of jacked-up Cash boom-chicka-boom ("That Ain't Right"), and an Eddie Cochran homage ("Crazy Pritty Baby"). The *coup de grace* is a piece of high-octane stop-and-go, "They Were Kings," that doesn't bow down to the usual suspects, but name-checks the Gories, the Cheater Slicks, and Doo Rag—Spencer's own royal pantheon of "misunderstood geniuses of rock-and-roll, wearing sideburns." Yeah, baby. STUART MUNRO

MICHELLE SHOCKED

TOHEAVENURIDE

(MIGHTY SOUND)

www.michelleshocked.com

Bringing that Holy Ghost feeling

Recorded at the Telluride Bluegrass Festival in 2003, *ToHeavenURide* (get it?) is a consistently upbeat, full-on gospel show from an artist who's never stayed in one place very long. Shocked's a cappella clap-along take on James A. Alexander's oft-recorded "Wade in the Water," with its evocative counterpoint harmonies from her band, could just as easily have come off a Mahalia Jackson album, and she does Sister Rosetta Tharpe proud on the easy-going opener "Strange Things Happening." "Study War No More," a staple of the Civil Rights era, has never been as necessary an anthem as it is today. An adaptation of the Band's "The Weight" doesn't quite convince as straight-ahead gospel though, and Shocked is no match for Billie Holiday when she attempts "God Bless the Child." Of the four originals (three of which appeared on 2002's precursor *Deep Natural*), the set-closing, reggae-tinted "Can't Take My Joy" best sums up the mood. JEFF TAMARKIN

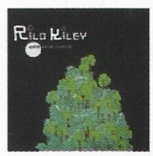
RILO KILEY

UNDER THE BLACKLIGHT

(WARNER BROS.)

www.warnerbrosrecords.com

So/Cal sting and country cackle



No longer so content to just be alterna-rock's country-iest kissing cousins, singer Jenny Lewis (after her recent bouts with name fame) and guitarist Blake Sennett hit upon the sniping Southern Cali sting of Fleetwood Mac's '70s for its brand of horseplay. Occasionally they parade that prancing pony onto the dance floor and let her kick. Sometimes, they let her settle. Either way, the Mac'd be proud. Bathed in a purplish hue unbeknownst to Rilo, Lewis' aching voice takes (broken) wing with a busted but resilient tone (see "The Moneymaker" for best results) whose sharpness is only surpassed by her rapier wit. With wistful-lit lyrics that ice their subject matter with an eloquent ire – the wrong-headed romances and left-out-to-dry lovers of "Breakin' Up" and "15"—Lewis takes flight. While "15" shows Rilo ain't left the country cackle too far behind, Sennett's own soul-strewn "Dreamworld" proves that they're trying. Giddy up. A.D. AMOROSI

King Wilkie

OKKERVIL RIVER

THE STAGE NAMES

(JAGJAGUWAR) www.jagjaguwar.com

A poetic tour de force

It's just a bad movie, where there's no cryin'," croons Will Sheff on the opening track of Okkervil River's fourth release. *The Stage Names* is hardly that, playing more like a film with vignettes of characters floating melancholically through the grittiest parts of the entertainment world. But *Stage* is no downer, instead taking you on a high-speed romp through the broken-down and dark places with just enough strut and swagger to keep the album from getting too gloomy. With reverb-soaked vocals and punchy, distressed guitar riffs, this has all the makings of a classic indie-rock stomper, with a few bonuses: the country-tinged "A Girl in Port," saddle-shoes and poodle-skirts era "You Can't Hold the Hand of the Rock and Roll Man" and music-box heartbreaker "Savannah Smiles."

Okkervil River

Taken as a whole or as a series of engrossing tales, *The Stage Names* is a poetic tour de force with both the modesty and sonic polish of a band in its prime. ALLIE GOOLRICK

KING WILKIE

LOW COUNTRY SUITE

(ZOË/ROUNDER) www.zoerecords.net

A forward-looking kind o' twang

On its sophomore outing, Virginia's King Wilkie manages to avoid all the pitfalls and hoary clichés that can bury lesser bands of the acoustic/country genre. Respectfully honoring great country traditions, the group still manages to be true to itself and to remain free to roam musically and lyrically. Also, the members avoid becoming too cloyingly earnest. Along with support from the likes of the ubiquitous Greg Leisz, the band never shows off its bluegrass chops or wastes time dragging out shopworn warhorses of country music to establish its roots cred. There are hints of Dylan with The Band, a nod to Alison Krauss, and echoes of those who have come before, but overall the group has its own unique sound. On a song like "Savannah," which someone will cover with great success, the group proves that above all, it has got the material to match the talent. STEVE MATTEO

KT TUNSTALL

DRASTIC FANTASTIC

(RELENTLESS/VIRGIN)

www.virginrecords.com

Something in the way she quavers

KT Tunstall isn't just an occasionally wily songwriter who provided *American Idol* never-was Katherine McPhee with her career's finest moment (a thumping "Black Horse and the Cherry Tree"). The she-Scot has a ruminative, blousy approach to song craft (not to mention a killer lower octave) that makes even her mumsiest moments striking. The quietude of "White Bird" and its tepid acoustic guitar's slide could've been as pale as its subject. Same thing happens within the coolly limpid, grungy atmospheres of "Funnyman." Yet, there's something in Tunstall's quavering chord shifts and her low-down singing of such that saves her. It happens on the swooshing rush of "Little Favours," where what could've been nothing but an emotional push-me-pull-you—the likes of which we'd get from Sheryl Crow—results in a bell-toned vocal's sarcastic sneer once heard from the magnificent Kirsty MacColl. KT's no Kirsty. Yet. But here's cheers for trying. A.D. AMOROSI

TURBONEGRO

RETOX

(COOKING VINYL) www.cookingvinyl.com

Semen spewing', denim wearin' deathpunk

Turbonegro is a bunch of Norwegian dudes born of the Apocalypse in the Age of Pamparius, who have scoured the bowels of rock 'n' roll, dredging up the carcasses of Krokus and Alice Cooper, Mötley Crüe and Iggy Pop, in search of good times and good riddance. The band imploded in the late '90s, but the semen-spewin', denim-wearin', faux-moeroti-rollers have returned in true deathpunk form, channeling and chastising all music that has cum before them (and after!). There's gonna be "Hell Toupee" (an ode to man wigs!) to those who stand in their way; Hank Von Helvete apes Iggy on "I Wanna Come"; and "What Is Rock" sounds like Tesco Vee's Meatmen. Everything is in place—Euroboy's hot licks, the massive riffs and even Happy Tom's phone pranks—to entice anybody, not just the Turbojugend. Are you ready for the darkness? GREG BARBERA

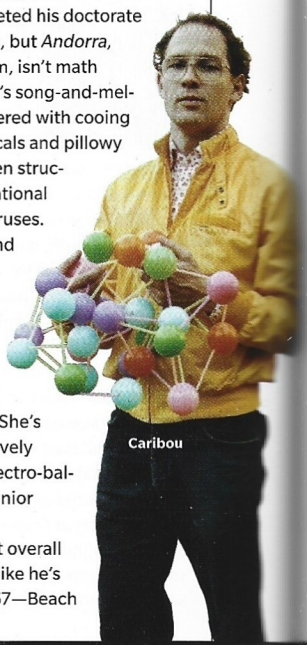
CARIBOU

ANDORRA

(MERGE) www.mergerecords.com

Sums are greater than the equations

2003's *Up In Flames*, Dan Snaith's mostly instrumental second album, burst with ideas, melding electronics and samples with psychedelic guitars and rock crescendos. Back then Snaith recorded as Manitoba, named after his home province in Canada (not after the Handsome wrestler who sued him); now, he records (basically alone) and tours (with a band) as Caribou. Snaith recently completed his doctorate in mathematics, but *Andorra*, his fourth album, isn't math rock. It's Snaith's song-and-melody record, layered with cooing and sighing vocals and pillowy harmonies, often structured in conventional verses and choruses. "Sundialing" and "Niobe" revisit the Krautrock that dominated 2005's *The Milk of Human Kindness* and "She's the One" is a lovely downtempo electro-ballad featuring Junior Boys' Jeremy Greenspan, but overall Snaith sounds like he's discovered 1967—Beach


Caribou

Boys, Zombies, Beatles—for songs such as "Melody Day" and "Eli." He keeps adding new variables to his equations, and the sums are still rewarding. STEVE KLINGE

A FINE FRENZY

ONE CELL IN THE SEA

(VIRGIN) www.virginrecords.com

A melancholic marvel

At the heart of A Fine Frenzy are the expressive, melancholy-laced vocals of pianist Alison Sudol, which imbue the tracks on this album with an underlying sadness. Case in point: the opening track, where she offers the otherwise enticing invitation "Come on, come out/The weather is warm" in tones of what sounds more like resignation. The same can be said of "Hope for the Hopeless," ostensibly a song of comfort, gradually building to a wash of sound, but never quite leaving the realm of sadness behind. Over the course of the album, especially in songs like the ode to unrequited love "Almost Lover," the emotional atmosphere becomes suffocating and almost cloying — it's a relief when Sudol finds something to celebrate about love, and life, in "You Picked Me." But above all, the music is heartfelt, the piano lines especially strong, and the sentiments evince a welcome sense of maturity in this 22-year-old performer. GILLIAN G. GAAR

MEAT PUPPETS

RISE TO YOUR KNEES

(ANODYNE) www.anodynerecords.com

Back to the future, Kirkwood style

Music, like life, moves in cycles. If you are fortunate enough to get in sync with these turning wheels, the world will often unfold at your fingertips. The Meat Puppets have tapped this vibe and created a stunning new album that reunites co-founder/bassist Cris Kirkwood (who recently put a long-standing heroin addiction behind him) with his brother, guitarist/vocalist Curt, for the first time in 12 years. What always set the Puppets apart from their punk counterparts was their instrumental abilities, melodic tendencies and desire to mix psychedelia ("Light The Fire"), twisted blues ("Vultures"), country ("Tiny Kingdom") and pop ("Island") into brilliant compositions. Nowhere is this blend more potent than on *Rise to Your Knees*. The band formed in 1980 during the deprived days of Reagan's reign; as fate would have it, the

Kirkwood brothers are back and once again climbing to prominence, this time under the dark shadow of Bush. AARON KAYCE

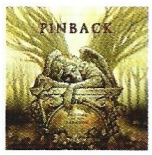
PINBACK

AUTUMN OF THE SERAPHS

(TOUCH & GO)

www.touchandgorecords.com

It's the hooks, stupid



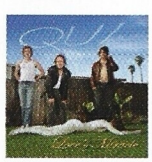
Masters at crafting catchy yet complex indie pop, San Diego's Pinback follows 2004's *Summer in Abaddon* with another arresting installment in its (presumed) Four Seasons in the Old Testament series. *Autumn of the Seraphs* pushes the pace, relying less on processed beats and more on live drumming to heighten the dynamic tension. The jackrabbit tempo of disc-opener "From Nothing to Nowhere" makes it the band's most aggressive song yet—though much of *Seraphs* doesn't lag far behind—and "Off By 50" might feature more textures than any previous Pinback song, which is saying something. The shifting time signatures and dense layers of staccato guitar lines, visceral bass runs and propulsive beats operate like engine cogs; they ratchet up the momentum until the songs erupt in climactic choruses of intricate counterpoint that'll have you bellowing along like a happy idiot. It may be melancholic fare, but Pinback never forgets pop's first rule: It's the hooks, stupid. JOHN SCHACHT

QUI

LOVE'S MIRACLE

(IPECAC) www.ipcecac.com

Music for the mentally imbalanced



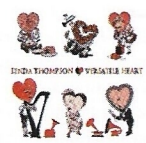
Frontmen are like major league pitchers—there are plenty who can get the job done, but few aces. Without disparaging Qui's 2003 debut LP, *Baby Kisses*, it's fair to say the addition late last year of shamanistic maniac David Yow to the rotation elevated Qui's game. The duo of drummer Paul Christensen and guitarist Matt Cronk make experimental rock that's wiry like Primus, with bursts of instrumental chaos recalling Hella, but when Yow shows up, like a mentally unbalanced yet somehow lovable derelict, he changes the energy of the room ineffably. Much of what he mutters is indistinguishable from gibberish, but it's entertaining. Particularly effective: the jazz-skronk track "Gash," whose animalistic pulse—Yow squealing "smack her"—recalls Jesus Lizard's "Nub"; and the sizzling "Freeze," which involves a story about a blown seal and suggests the fuzzed, psych-freak outs of the Butthole Surfers. The album also includes a reverent cover of Pink Floyd's "Echoes." CHRIS PARKER

LINDA THOMPSON

VERSATILE HEART

(ROUNDER) www.rounder.com

The matriarch of contemporary folk



Linda Thompson still doesn't perform or record much; this is her first album since 2002's *Fashionably Late*, itself a comeback from a vocal disorder that had prevented her from promptly following up 1985's bid at pop stardom, *One Clear Moment*. But she nevertheless has found herself as a recording artist, with a rich, pure voice that accentuates stillness and mournful tranquility in the manner of Britain's finest folk/traditional singer, June Tabor. Yet Thompson isn't really a traditionalist, although *Versatile Heart* includes "Katy Cruel." Rather, she uses the form to offer some fairly stunning new songs written or co-written by a support group that includes Rufus Wainwright (whose ballad "Beauty" is a standout, helped by Antony's back-up vocals) and her and ex-husband Richard's son (and Wainwright's friend) Teddy, whose catchy, lilting title song recalls the McGarrigle sisters' "Heartbeats Accelerating." Together, the Thompsons and McGarrigle/Wainwrights have become the first family of contemporary folk. STEVEN ROSEN

KERRY BROWN

JOHN VANDERSLICE

EMERALD CITY

(BARSUK) www.barsuk.com

A controlled, artful howl of horror

John Vanderslice continues to emerge as one of the strangest and most compellingly thought-provoking of current singer-songwriters—part Harry Nilsson, part Kurt Cobain. His gorgeous melodies and arrangements often have the warm sensitivity of late-1960s sunshiny pop, although they're just as often undercut with ominous, discordant minor-key intrusions ("The Minaret") and tensely churning guitar. But the lyrics and forebodingly sad vocals are chilling—apocalyptic, even, such as on the opening "Kookaburra." Only partially hiding behind his characters and his obtuse, sometimes-literary wordplay, Vanderslice seems to have internalized the horrors of 9/11 and the subsequent Age of Terror ("The Parade," "Tablespoon of Codeine") in ways singularly frightening yet simultaneously beautiful. The San Francisco-based former MK Ultra member, in his controlled and artful way, is creating a modern *Howl*. STEVEN ROSEN

OKKERVIL RIVER

THE STAGE NAMES

(JAGJAGUWAR) www.jagjaguwar.com

A poetic tour de force

It's just a bad movie, where there's no cryin'," croons Will Sheff on the opening track of Okkervil River's fourth release. *The Stage Names* is hardly that, playing more like a film with vignettes of characters floating melancholically through the grittiest parts of the entertainment world. But *Stage* is no downer, instead taking you on a high-speed romp through the broken-down and dark places with just enough strut and swagger to keep the album from getting too gloomy. With reverb-soaked vocals and punchy, distressed guitar riffs, this has all the makings of a classic indie-rock stomper, with a few bonuses: the country-tinged "A Girl in Port," saddle-shoes and poodle-skirts era "You Can't Hold the Hand of the Rock and Roll Man" and music-box heartbreaker "Savannah Smiles."

Okkervil River

Taken as a whole or as a series of engrossing tales, *The Stage Names* is a poetic tour de force with both the modesty and sonic polish of a band in its prime. ALLIE GOOLRICK

KING WILKIE

LOW COUNTRY SUITE

(ZOË/ROUNDER) www.zoerecords.net

A forward-looking kind o' twang

On its sophomore outing, Virginia's King Wilkie manages to avoid all the pitfalls and hoary clichés that can bury lesser bands of the acoustic/country genre. Respectfully honoring great country traditions, the group still manages to be true to itself and to remain free to roam musically and lyrically. Also, the members avoid becoming too cloyingly earnest. Along with support from the likes of the ubiquitous Greg Leisz, the band never shows off its bluegrass chops or wastes time dragging out shopworn warhorses of country music to establish its roots cred. There are hints of Dylan with The Band, a nod to Alison Krauss, and echoes of those who have come before, but overall the group has its own unique sound. On a song like "Savannah," which someone will cover with great success, the group proves that above all, it has got the material to match the talent. STEVE MATTEO

King Wilkie

KT TUNSTALL

DRASTIC FANTASTIC

(RELENTLESS/VIRGIN)

www.virginrecords.com

Something in the way she quavers

KT Tunstall isn't just an occasionally wily songwriter who provided *American Idol* never-was Katherine McPhee with her career's finest moment (a thumping "Black Horse and the Cherry Tree"). The she-Scot has a ruminative, blousy approach to song craft (not to mention a killer lower octave) that makes even her mumsiest moments striking. The quietude of "White Bird" and its tepid acoustic guitar's slide could've been as pale as its subject. Same thing happens within the coolly limpid, grungy atmospheres of "Funnyman." Yet, there's something in Tunstall's quavering chord shifts and her low-down singing of such that saves her. It happens on the swooshing rush of "Little Favours," where what could've been nothing but an emotional push-me-pull-you—the likes of which we'd get from Sheryl Crow—results in a bell-toned vocal's sarcastic sneer once heard from the magnificent Kirsty MacColl. KT's no Kirsty. Yet. But here's cheers for trying. A.D. AMOROSI

TURBONEGRO

RETOX

(COOKING VINYL) www.cookingvinyl.com

Semen spewing', denim wearin' deathpunk

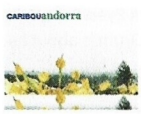
Turbonegro is a bunch of Norwegian dudes born of the Apocalypse in the Age of Pamparius, who have scoured the bowels of rock 'n' roll, dredging up the carcasses of Krokus and Alice Cooper, Mötley Crüe and Iggy Pop, in search of good times and good riddance. The band imploded in the late '90s, but the semen-spewin', denim-wearin', faux-moeroti-rollers have returned in true deathpunk form, channeling and chastising all music that has cum before them (and after!). There's gonna be "Hell Toupee" (an ode to man wigs!) to those who stand in their way; Hank Von Helvete apes Iggy on "I Wanna Come"; and "What Is Rock" sounds like Tesco Vee's Meatmen. Everything is in place—Euroboy's hot licks, the massive riffs and even Happy Tom's phone pranks—to entice anybody, not just the Turbojugend. Are you ready for the darkness? GREG BARBERA

CARIBOU

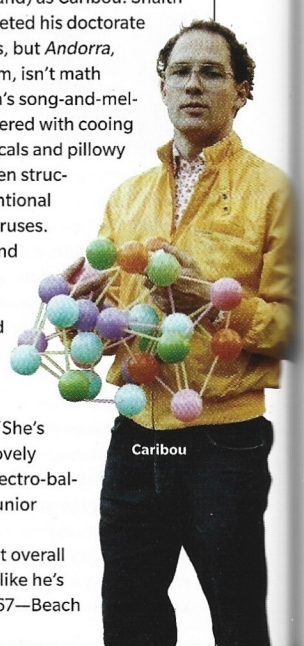
ANDORRA

(MERGE) www.mergerecords.com

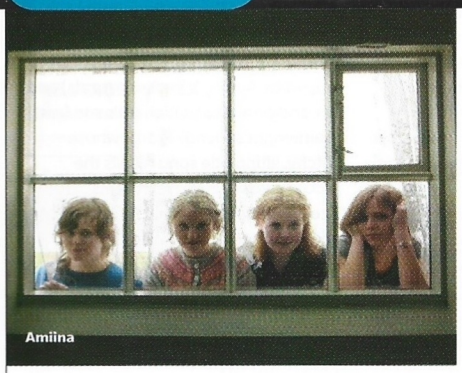
Sums are greater than the equations



2003's *Up In Flames*, Dan Snaith's mostly instrumental second album, burst with ideas, melding electronics and samples with psychedelic guitars and rock crescendos. Back then Snaith recorded as Manitoba, named after his home province in Canada (not after the Handsome wrestler who sued him); now, he records (basically alone) and tours (with a band) as Caribou. Snaith recently completed his doctorate in mathematics, but *Andorra*, his fourth album, isn't math rock. It's Snaith's song-and-melody record, layered with cooing and sighing vocals and pillowy harmonies, often structured in conventional verses and choruses. "Sundialing" and "Niobe" revisit the Krautrock that dominated 2005's *The Milk of Human Kindness* and "She's the One" is a lovely downtempo electro-ballad featuring Junior Boys' Jeremy Greenspan, but overall Snaith sounds like he's discovered 1967—Beach



Caribou



Amiina

1990s

COOKIES

(ROUGH TRADE) www.roughtraderecords.com

Despite the fact that the 1990s are long standing veterans of the Glaswegian Indie scene (consisting of ex-members of perennial coulda-been-contenders the Yummy Fur and V Twin), their debut is a ridiculously, joyously, trashy gem of a record which somehow captures and distils the absolute essence of adolescent swagger. We're talking art school kids playing dumb, a riotous celebration of bubblegum rock 'n' roll. We're talking huge hooks, riffs that just won't quit and choruses catchier than a rabid spider monkey on crack. We're talking British Glam Rock at its most moronic with a healthy dash of '70s NYC attitude in the shape of the New York Dolls, the Ramones, Jonathan Richman and Lou Reed at his camp best. If this fails to elicit at the very least a wry grin of recognition, then you, my friend, are quite possibly dead. It's all been done before of course, but it's played with such flash and pizzazz, with such unfettered glee that, ultimately, resistance is futile. NEIL FERGUSON

ACID MOTHERS TEMPLE

CRYSTAL RAINBOW PYRAMID UNDER THE STARS

(IMPORTANT) www.importantrecords.com

NAM MYO HO REN GE KYO

(ACE FU) www.acefu.com

Recent shifts in personnel prompted Acid Mothers Temple to tag "and the Melting Paraiso U. F.O." onto an already lengthy moniker, although while lineups and titles may be in flux, rest assured the musical approach is very much the same. Just as Sonic Youth has a way of morphing with each release, AMT consistently peaks in new corners. *Crystal Rainbow Pyramid Under the Stars* and *Nam Myo Ho Ren Ge Kyo*, however, offer few new discoveries for the group. Neither release represents anything transcending the group's catalog to date, epic songs heavy on Black Sabbath basslines and effect-driven guitars setting the tone of the proceedings. For fans, it's a decadent indulgence documenting AMT working themselves into "the zone." Few bands approach releases with the same "just let the tape roll" bravado of this one, and the upside is a bold outfit chronicling its evolution at its own pace. The downside is the occasional plateau in the trajectory. MIKE MCKEE

AMIINA

KURR

(EVER) www.everrecords.com

Amiina is best known as the all-female quartet who has supported Sigur Rós, both live and in the studio, over the past five years. *Kurr* is its debut full-length album (on Ever, an imprint of electronica label K7), and though it treads much of the same artistic territory as its more famous counterparts, Amiina successfully carves out a minimalist vision all its own. *Kurr*'s songs are gorgeously crafted mini-suites that slowly unravel to reveal a firmly melodic core, violins and cellos fluttering amid a sea of metallophones while carefully placed singing saws add texture to the arrangement. The album has a slow-burn quality to it as each composition gently crescendos and builds upon an initially simple motif. Amiina shoots for the same kind of emotional resonance as Sigur Rós, but it does it with subtlety and nuance rather than grandiosity. This is epic minimalism. MATT KIVEL

ARCHITECTURE IN HELSINKI

PLACES LIKE THIS

(POLYVINYL) polyvinylrecords.com

Everything you thought you knew about Architecture in Helsinki is upside down in *Places Like This*. Cameron Bird and crew toss out the fey, baroquely orchestrated songs of *In Case*

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We Die in favor of hard-funk, island-hopping kegger tunes. Gone, too, are the whimsical death-obsessed lyrics, since the worst outcome here is ending up on telephone hold. What's more, the band must have had a yard sale for all that world-music-y percussion from the last CD. All they need this time out is cowbell, cowbell, cowbell! New fans may enjoy the hedonistic energy of cuts like "Red Turned White" with its aggressively synthy, sexual beats, or "Hold Music"'s rickety double-dutch rhythms. But in comparison to earlier work, the gaiety seems coarse, forced and frat-rock-esque. It's really only on the optimistically named "Nothing's Wrong" that the old AIH re-emerges, blithely strumming ditties about decapitations, crows and vultures. Everybody dance now! JENNIFER KELLY

THE A-SIDES

SILVER STORMS

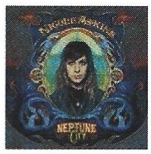
(VAGRANT) www.vagrant.com

What essentially began as a punk rock label, Vagrant, has stepped up to the plate lately with adventurous recordings by bands like the Hold Steady, the Comas and, now, the A-Sides, a Philadelphia five-piece that turned heads on its 2005 debut, *Hello, Hello*. There's some ambitious psych-oriented stuff like the Radiohead-ish "My Heroes Have Always Been Crazy" or the 6 ½ minute "Always in Trouble" but this bunch are at their best when they open the throttle up a bit more. The driving "We're the Trees" and the pristine, string-soaked "Great American Novelist" perfectly demonstrate the band's pop sensibility. These lads are coming into their own and the records brims with confidence, and while the production by Brian McTear (Bitter Bitter Weeks, Matt Pond PA, Mazarin) is all aces, I'd give the band one bit of advice: Don't be afraid to get happy. TIM HINELY

NICOLE ATKINS

NEPTUNE CITY

(COLUMBIA) www.columbiarecords.com



With a voice as big and bold as Shirley Bassey's or Petula Clark's, and brimming with the warbly sensuality of Jenny Lewis or Saint Etienne's Sarah Cracknell, the luscious Nicole Atkins is clearly a girl on the move. The question is, to where? Thanks to the over-the-top production of Sweden's Tore Johansson (Cardigans), who never met a symphonic swell of sweeping strings he didn't like, the stunning Atkins pipes are pushed to the very top of the mix for every track on her long-playing debut. When deployed judiciously, that can be *good* thing, but the effect here is oddly sterile, almost cartoonish. It's as if someone set a cardboard standup of Atkins in front of a screen, behind which the Nelson Riddle Orchestra dutifully saws away, aiming for the classics but coming off as canned. Yes, Atkins will be going places. First, though, she'll need to find a way out of the karaoke bar. FRED MILLS

Nicole Atkins

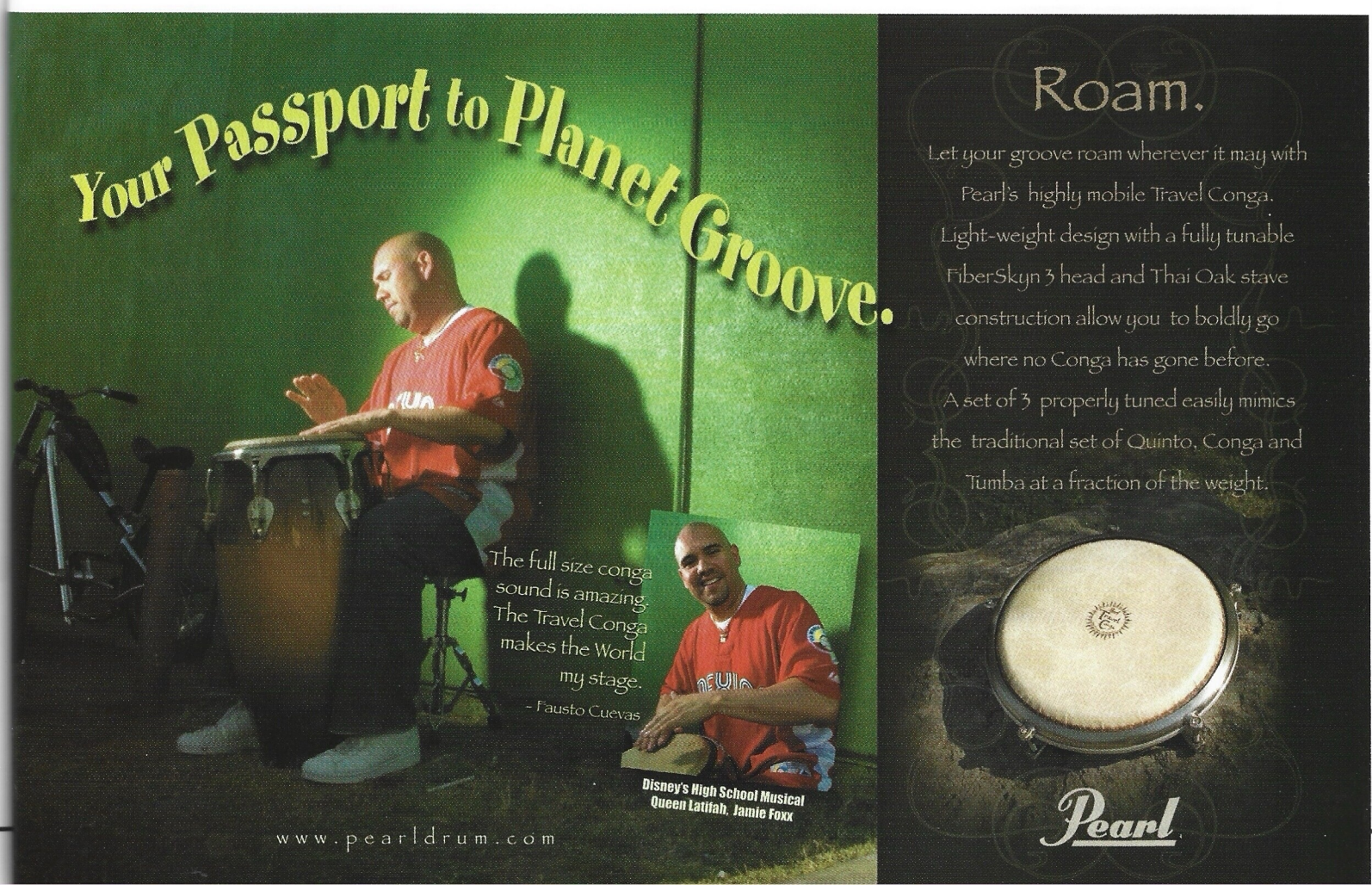
STEVE BARTON AND THE OBLIVION CLICK

FLICKER OF TIME

(SLEEPLESS) www.redeyeusa.com

By the looks of the photo on the CD's inner sleeve, one of L.A.'s fabled jacaranda trees has crashed upon a humble backyard recording facility. Perhaps it's to say that not even a hypothetical freak accident can dissuade Steve Barton from going forward in his singer-songwriter post-Translator years, despite his relative obscurity since he and his

JENNIFER TZAR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www.pearldrum.com
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Pearl

former band ruled the college airwaves with the jangly-nerved "Everywhere That I'm Not." Barton remains a true foot soldier, pursuing the rock'n'roll mystery. His love affair with Britpop and his knack for tunes that roll off the tongue and from his guitar effortlessly have cemented his status as a lifer. For this thematic homage to time, Barton takes on its passage in crashing waves of sound and verse, from the Hitchcockian (Robyn variety) "Cartoon Safe," and "Goodbye Oblivion" to "Winter Light" (righteous first-wave art punk). Throughout, Barton maintains his real-deal ties to the road that leads all the way from Memphis. DENISE SULLIVAN

CHRIS BATHGATE

A CORK TALE WAKE

(QUITE SCIENTIFIC) www.quitescientific.com

The way he navigates the stark, acoustic devastation of "The Last Parade on Ann St." or the jarringly intimate "Cold Fusion (Snakes)," you can see how Chris Bathgate would find himself so frequently compared to such downtrodden indie-folk icons as Bonnie "Prince" Billy and Jason Molina. But Bathgate never paints himself into an old-sad-bastard music corner. The piano-and-cello-fueled ballad that opens the album is far too melodic for that, while the grittier "Smiles Like A Fist" is damn near raucous, with blurts of distorted guitar, an almost Neptunes-like piano loop and muted trumpet. It's the unexpected ways he fleshes out the heartache in his voice that makes this album

Bitter Bitter Weeks

such a melancholy treasure, from the big wave of My Bloody Valentine-loving guitars that punctuate "The Last Parade on Ann St." to the mariachi horns and buzzing chamber strings of "Every Wall You Own." ED MASLEY

BITTER BITTER WEEKS

PEACE IS BURNING LIKE A RIVER

(HIGH TWO) www.hightwo.com

Brian McTear sounds like the saddest man alive. The voice behind Bitter Bitter Weeks, he wishes during this album's opening minutes that his airplane would crash "like eggs to the ground/finally peace for once and for all." He then goes on to sing about fear ("They're coming to get me, aren't they?") and despair in a high, fragile tenor in song after song. It wouldn't mean anything if the music surrounding these bleak thoughts wasn't so damn beautiful. And happy, in many cases. In fact, if the lyric sheet is overlooked, the jangly guitars and sea of vocals on *Peace Is Burning Like a River* could easily find a spot along with bands like Big Star, the Kinks and early R.E.M. Combine these disparities — along with BBW's evolution from a McTear solo project into a band that includes members of Velvet Crush, the A-Sides and Apollo Sunshine — and the results pay remarkable dividends. MIKE SHANLEY

POPA CHUBBY

ELECTRIC CHUBBYLAND: VOLUMES ONE & TWO

(BLIND PIG) www.blindpigrecords.com

To borrow a Hollywood term, Popa Chubby makes "high-concept" music. His blues-rock firestorm, with its roadhouse guitar virtuosity and gnarled white-soul shouting, is the sonic equivalent of *Die Hard*. Entertaining as hell and smart because he perfects a style with a high potential for idiocy, he's a pomo electric bluesman who's made good with hipsters (even if ironically or because he played with Richard Hell). *Electric Chubbyland*, two sold-separately volumes of straight Hendrix covers (some standards, some surprising album cuts), were recorded live in New York for Blind Pig and only up his aptitude for tortuous bar-band clichés. He (mostly) avoids these pitfalls by relishing in them and going for broke with beer-can-crushing Strat pyrotechnics. Seriously—if you don't squint your eyes, dig one steel toe into the floor and start air-shreddin' to "Who Knows" or "Spanish Castle Magic," too much Bright Eyes has numbed your capacity for joy. EVAN HAGA

MICHAEL T. REGAN

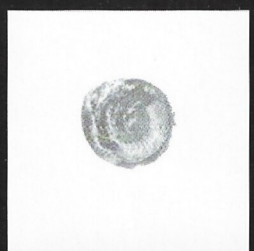
LEWIS & CLARKE
BLASTS OF HOLY BIRTH

Lewis & Clarke takes us on a "Post-Folk Neo-Baroque" journey through the intricate mysteries of creation. Nylon stringed and bowed instruments are set to transcendental verse and laced with future-primitive synth melodies, transporting us from structured chamber folk into meditative passageways. Contributions from members of Man-Man and Rachel's.

Dragon Turtle / Strand of Oaks *Split 7"*

The melding of minds occur in this haunting and gorgeous combination of two philosophical approaches, a swirl of the literal and metaphoric.

"A page of a nature journal tucked into a philosopher's diary and set adrift, over unfettered voices and instruments."
—Erasing Clouds



Lewis & Clarke *Live on WPRB*

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"This live set of expansive, intricate folk is fleshed out by a variety of textures...every note is wound up with import."
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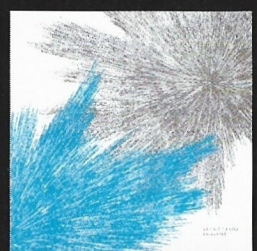

La Société Expéditionnaire
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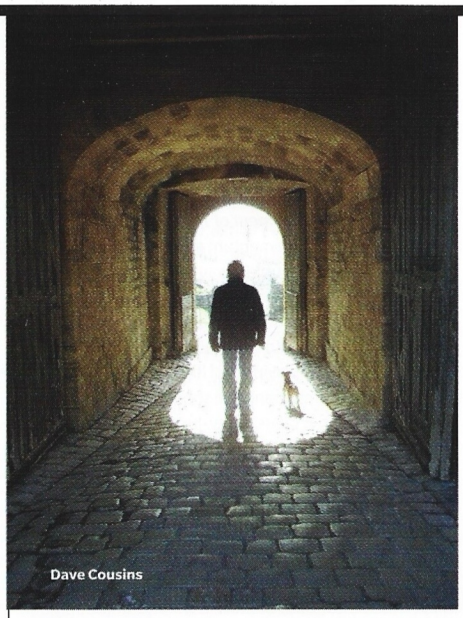
En Route: Full Lengths from Strand of Oaks and Moon & Moon

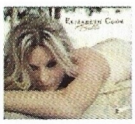


Dave Cousins

ELIZABETH COOK

BALLS

(31 TIGERS) www.thirtytigers.com



One sure result of the widening chasm between mainstream country music, i.e., clownish pop bands playing rock music, and anything more imaginative or—heaven forbid!—actually connected to country music tradition is that talents like Elizabeth Cook fall between the cracks. A country gal who knows her way around a hillbilly tune like opener "Times Are Tough in Rock 'n' Roll," Cook also mixes in a blues grind ("Don't Go Borrowing Trouble"), the obligatory rowdy feminist manifesto ("Sometimes It Take Balls to Be a Woman") and for the thinkers in the crowd, a superb cover of the Velvet Underground's "Sunday Morning." Produced by Rodney Crowell, this sparkling collection is also highlighted by a trio of hot Nashville guitar players—Kenny Vaughan, Richard Bennett and husband Tim Carroll—and duet and backup vocals from Crowell, Bobby Bare Jr., and Nanci Griffith. Balancing alt-country cred and country soul is a trick, but like the title says, this girl's got *cojones*. ROBERT BAIRD

DAVE COUSINS

THE BOY IN THE SAILOR SUIT

(WITCHWOOD) www.witchwoodrecords.co.uk

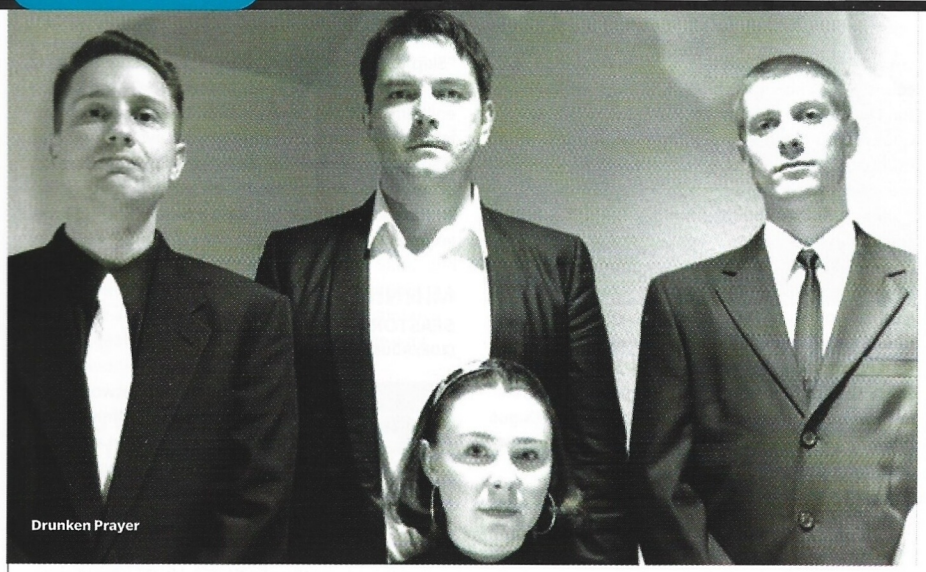
It's been 35 years since Dave Cousins, singer and primary songwriter for British folk-rock legends the Strawbs, recorded a solo album. It's not that he lacked anything to say; his band released a dozen albums during that time. No, *The Boy in the Sailor Suit* is the father Cousins never knew, smiling down at him from a photograph, the album itself a reflection on the past and the fleeting nature of relationships. "The Smile You Left Behind" is a memoir of his parents' courtship, a gentle musical background framing Cousins' creaky vocals. "Skip To My Lou," based on the familiar childhood song, is a tale of love lost, haunted by Ian Cutler's enchanted fiddling and guitarist Miller Anderson's imaginative leads. Cousins' intricate wordplay is on display throughout, the album offering a balance of acoustic folk and electric rock, an appropriate soundtrack for this lyrical celebration of life and love. REV. KEITH A. GORDON

MINNIE DRIVER

SEASTORIES

(ZOË/ROUNDER) www.zoerecords.net

In the brilliant FX Network TV series *The Riches*, Minnie Driver plays the mom in a family of trailer-trash grifters who steal the identities of a wealthy, deceased couple and, though facing no shortage of obstacles, assume a high life they've never known. *Seastories*, Driver's second album, leaves a similar impression: Although Driver sang before she ever acted, and is comfortable in the role, it still feels like a role. Her lite-country is well-produced and her voice is sweet and sincere, but there's little about it that suggests a true identity. Driver enlists plenty of A-list help, from Ryan Adams and his band the Cardinals to Liz Phair, who lends backing vocals to "Sorry Baby," the earnest second track. Driver's vocals are assured, the songs melodic and well-crafted, the sentiments real. The only thing keeping Driver the singer from matching Driver the actor is her tentativeness in the studio: once she throws away the script she'll be there. JEFF TAMARKIN



Drunken Prayer

DIANE MURPHY

DRUNKEN PRAYER

DRUNKEN PRAYER

(SELF-RELEASED) www.drunkenprayer.com

Straight outta Portland, Ore., by way of purgatory and a few county jails is Morgan Geer, who with his lapsed Baptist cohorts fully lives up to the band-name. Geer gets right down to the genuflecting with "I'm Gonna Lay Down in Front of My Lord," a stately, horns-and-slide-guitar number that's one part the Band, one part *Tonight's The Night* and several parts sinner's remorse. Later, in the woozy, Bad Seeds-in-New Orleans *noir* waltz "What Made Me Kill," Geer tries to blame his misdeeds on the booze 'n' pills, and his flophouse braying almost makes you want to take pity on him. *Almost*. Because by the time the band plows into a twang-glam-punk, positively murderous, version of Leadbelly staple "Take This Hammer," you start to get the sense that Geer likes his sinnin'—a lot. Upright citizens, drop to your knees and utter a few prayers of your own if the band comes to town. This Geer boy, he's bad news. FRED MILLS

TINSLEY ELLIS

MOMENT OF TRUTH

(ALLIGATOR) www.alligator.com

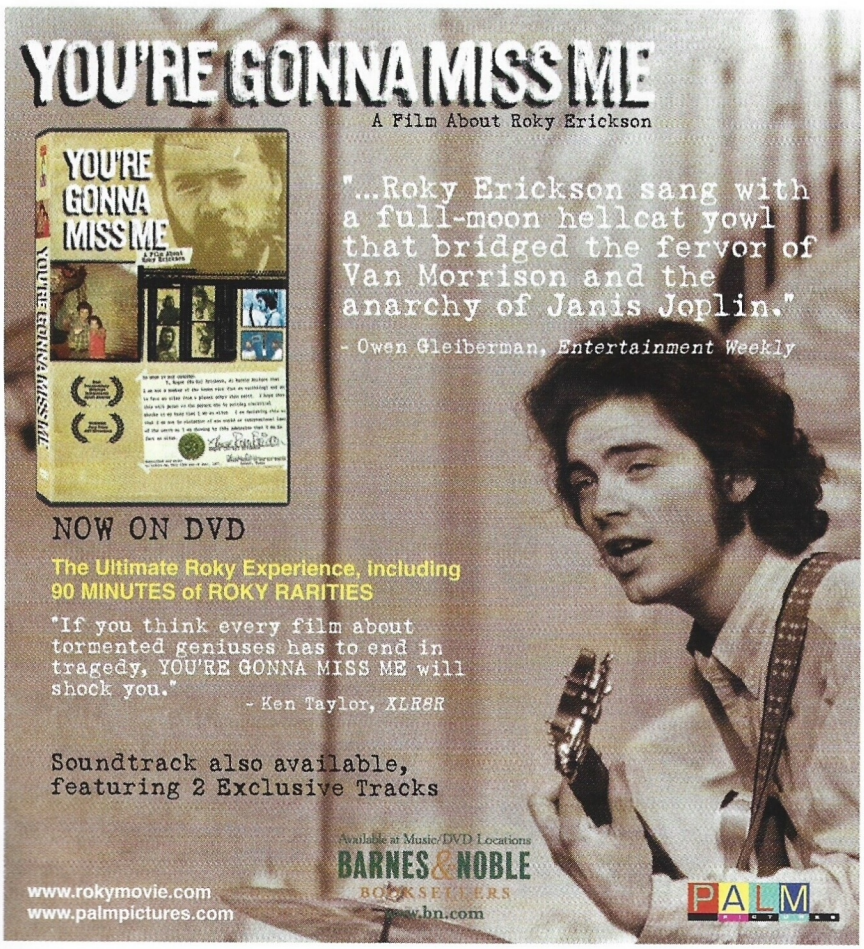
Paced like a live show, electric bluesman Tinsley Ellis' *Moment of Truth* gathers heft and momentum as it rolls along. After a couple of cautious but firmly declarative numbers, Ellis gets into the grit right on time and makes any caveats unnecessary. Wisely, Ellis plays to his strong suit: his wicked, tradition-rooted guitar playing and its biting, full-throated tone. But while he may sing like someone who has learned to do so out of necessity, he does so with great results—a little bit Robin Trower, a little bit Peter Green—far outdistancing the bulk of his contemporaries. Powerful, fluid and confidently bad-assed, Ellis takes a craftsman's approach to his guitar playing and to his music overall. That makes *Moment Of Truth* reliably free of false steps or superfluous filigree and that's both rare and welcome. The work is righteously strong and the title is right on the money, honey. RICK ALLEN

FRANK SMITH

HEAVY HANDED PEACE AND LOVE

(YE OLDE) www.yeolderecords.com

Frank Smith would have killed in 1997. But the novelty of punkers turning twang is gone, and it takes that little something extra today to rise above the saturated country-rock field—some-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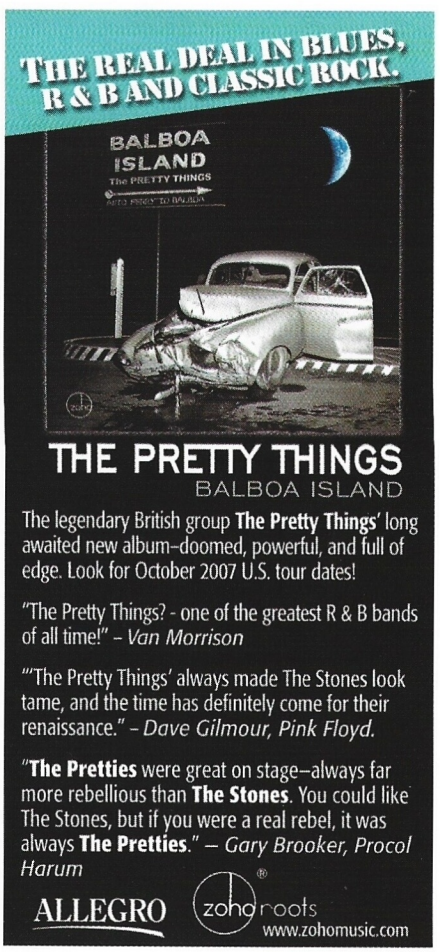
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ALLEGRO
zoho roots
www.zohomusic.com

thing this Austin-via-Boston sextet shows the promise of doing with its fourth full-length. "Liar and a Thief" opens the record on a high note, the noise-fueled intro evolving into harp-powered, *Harvest*-era Neil Young, and then splashed with some psychedelic touches à la Beachwood Sparks. "Throwin' Rocks" sounds like *A.M.* Wilco, while "Lovesick Cynics" is a Stones-y blues ballad suffused with just the right balance of bile and resignation. Variations on those formulas define the record's best cuts, suggesting the band is strongest when it steps away from the confines of trad country. The awful garage-rock-meets-the-Band title cut isn't the direction they should head in either, but the further they get from the alt-country-by-numbers, the better. JOHN SCHACHT

FREDDIE STEADY 5

TEX POP

(STEADYBOY) www.steadyboyrecords.com

Freddie "Steady" Krc is known as Roky Erickson's drummer in the Explosives, but Austinites and rootspower-pop aficionados also know the Texas Hall of Famer from his work with Jerry Jeff Walker and as singer/guitarist for his own combos, Freddie Steady's Wild Country, the Shakin' Apostles and the Freddie Steady 5. *Tex Pop* serves up a scrumptious multi-genre musical buffet, and devotees of *der jangle* in particular will find themselves a few chords closer to heaven. From the sinewy, modal riffing of "Just Down the Road" (a Brit Invasion-styled marriage of Kinks and the Sir Douglas Quintet) and the Big Star/Marshall Crenshaw-worthy "If She Were Mine" to ace covers of Gene Clark (12-string-draped "She Has a Way") and Jimmy Silva (the Seattle popster's luminous "Tin Whistle & a Wooden Drum"), Krc & Co.—which includes Explosives guitarist Cam King—hit all the right notes. Notes, incidentally, that'll twang deep in your heart. FRED MILLS

Erik Friedlander

KURT GELLERSTED

ERIK FRIEDLANDER

BLOCK ICE & PROPANE

(SKIPSTONE) www.erikfriedlander.com

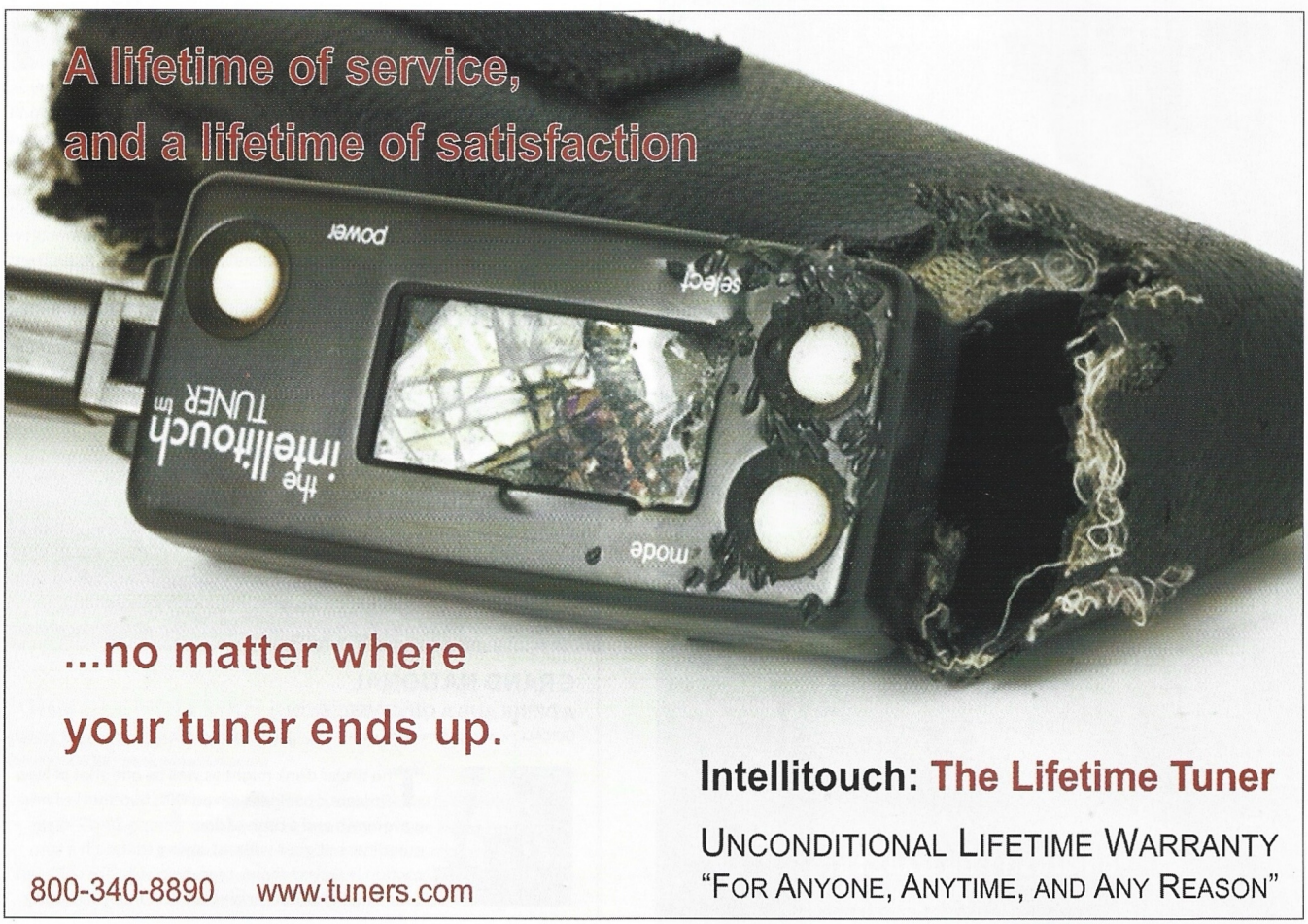
If the thought of listening to a solo cello recording has you slinking back in fear before you even hear a note, that's all the more reason to give *Block Ice & Propane* a spin. For one thing, half the time you'll forget that it's one of those supersized fiddles making those broad-stroked, elegant, expectations-defying sounds: Friedlander throws the rulebook in the trash, along with the bow and all preconceived notions of his instrument's role. Much of this instrumental travelogue—the compositions were inspired by Friedlander's childhood camping trips—is finger-picked and improvised, the resultant creations reminiscent of a particularly reflective John Fahey or Leo Kottke session rather than any stuffy string quartet. Friedlander has worked within jazz, classical and pop before, but this is a genre-free zone. It's challenging, but the return for taking that challenge is in the rich depth and diversity Friedlander and his über-axe deliver. JEFF TAMARKIN

THE GO

HOWL ON THE HAUNTED BEAT YOU RIDE

(CASS) www.cassrecords.com

Once boasting Jack White as member, these former Detroit proto-punks have dumped the MC5/Amboy Dukes infatuation in favor of an ever-



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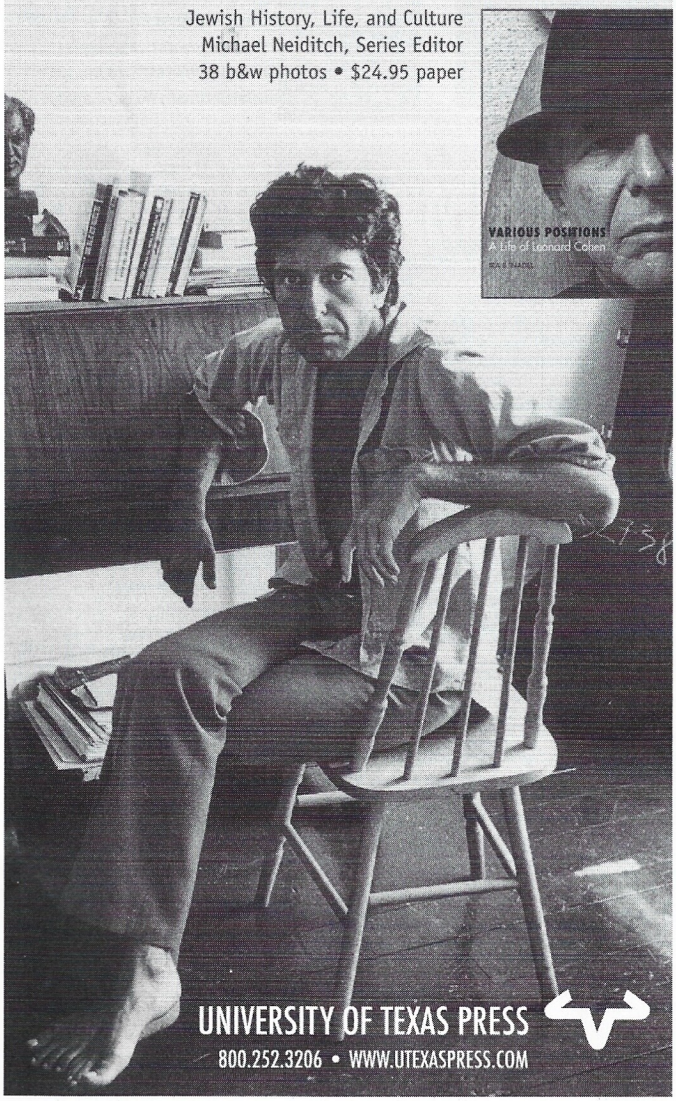

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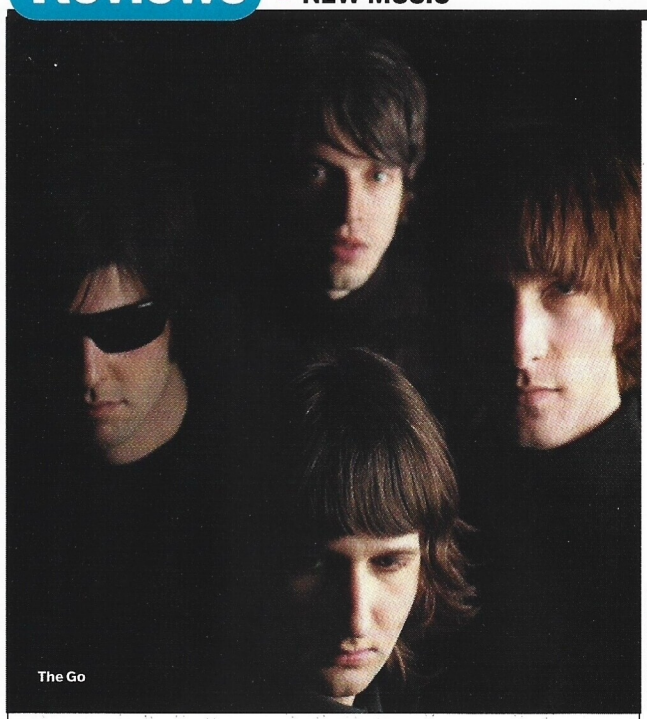


The Go

FABRIZIO COSTANTINI

expanding mid-'60s-inspired psych-rock thrill ride of twists, turns and dive-bombing instrumental ferocity. The Go has defiantly conceived an album to be revered in the sacred halls of garage-punk unknowns, concocting an idiosyncratic though retro-sounding mystique the Chesterfield Kings tried to pull off 25 years ago (and failed). With rabid singer-producer-engineer Bobby Harlow pouring every fiber of fuzzed-out soul into this highly ambitious acuity, he pays homage to the Yardbirds, Strawberry Alarm Clock and Beach Boys with unbridled urgency. Yet abundant classic rock influences ranging from Rundgren fronting Mott the Hoople on "Caroline," to the buoyant glam-pop of T. Rex on "Yer Stoned Italian Cowboy" to the Creation-meets-Kiss sleaziness of "Mercurial Girl" abound. Despite smelling of blatant hero worship, this is one of the best albums of 1967 recorded 40 years too late. RON BALLY

GORE GORE GIRLS

GET THE GORE
(BLOODSHOT) www.bloodshotrecords.com

The biggest problem with *Get the Gore* is you can't see the trio of miniskirt-clad, go-go booted guitarists shredding in tandem. Live, these latter-day Runaways' choreographed ass-kicking produces the kind of sordid fantasies that bloom only in the fetid hothouse of the male imagination. On disc, their garage-rock girl band shtick sounds as tired as Andrew Dice Clay. Producer Jim Diamond does his best to get a beefy sound, but it lacks a gritty undercurrent to salvage slightly written come-ons such as "Sweet Potato," and "Voodoo Doll." Kim Fowley co-writes "Pleasure Unit," which is only a small improvement on the lyrically challenged "Fox in a Box" ("and she wants to rock," natch). While there are redeeming moments (a cover of "Where Evil Grows" and the chunky "Loaded Heart") the balance is as memorable as a drunken one-night stand—fine for the moment, but not something you'd spend a lot of time with. CHRIS PARKER

GRAND NATIONAL

A DRINK AND A QUICK DECISION
(RECALL) www.recallrecords.com

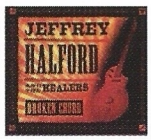
The titular drink might as well be one shot of New Romantic coolness mixed with two shots of new wave synth and a dash of downtempo Zero 7-style moodiness. It goes without saying that such a concoction is served cooler-than-bein'-cool ice cold, but Grand National's surprising achievement is making

such a potentially frigid mix sound like it was created by people with actual blood flowing through their veins. And while it's easy to play "who does this one sound like?" (Gary Numan on "Animal Sounds," Tears for Fears on "By the Time I Get Home There Won't Be Much of a Place for Me"), in the end the songs stand on their own with sturdy melodies and irresistible grooves. ERIC SCHUMACHER-RASMUSSEN

JEFFREY HALFORD AND THE HEALERS

BROKEN CHORD

(SHOELESS) www.bdcdistribution.com



After five critically acclaimed albums, Bay Area denizen Jeffrey Halford has little to prove at this point. He's got a crack band in the Healers, he plays visceral guitar with slinky abandon and he writes rootsy swampy blues songs that sting and soothe equally. Halford continues his quality streak with *Broken Chord*, recorded in two days with no overdubs. Halford is often likened to vintage John Fogerty/Creedence with good reason; "Dead Man's Hand" and the post-Katrina ode "Louisiana Man" shuffle and swerve like a shot of CCR with a Sonny Landreth chaser. "Rock 'n' Fire" and "In a Dream" brim with Tex-Mex magic thanks to Augie Meyers' delirious organ fills, and "Rockabilly Bride" swings with Chris Isaak's sense of dark joy as Halford simultaneously namechecks and honors his influences. Buzzed on a raucous Ry Cooder/Tom Petty/Bruce Springsteen cocktail, Jeffrey Halford respects music history by updating the writing on the stone. BRIAN BAKER

DEBORAH HARRY

NECESSARY EVIL

(ELEVEN SEVEN MUSIC) www.10thst.com

Since her glory days with Blondie, Deborah Harry's never released a wholly satisfying solo album. That's true of *Necessary Evil*, but as is also true of her solo works, there are occasional bright spots. For example, the album gets off to a good start with the "Two Times Blues," as light and breezy a slice of pop as you could wish for. But it then flounders around in search of a compelling style, and never really coalesces; Harry sings each song well enough, but doesn't always fully make them her own. Songs like "School for Scandal" and "If I Had You" cruise the more formulaic side of the street, while "What Is Love" and "Whiteout" each suffer from a lyrical repetitiousness. The same could be said of "You're Too Hot," but it also has a welcome edginess, as the sassy "Dirty and Deep," which harkens back to the days of "Rapture." But overall, a mixed bag. GILLIAN G. GAAR

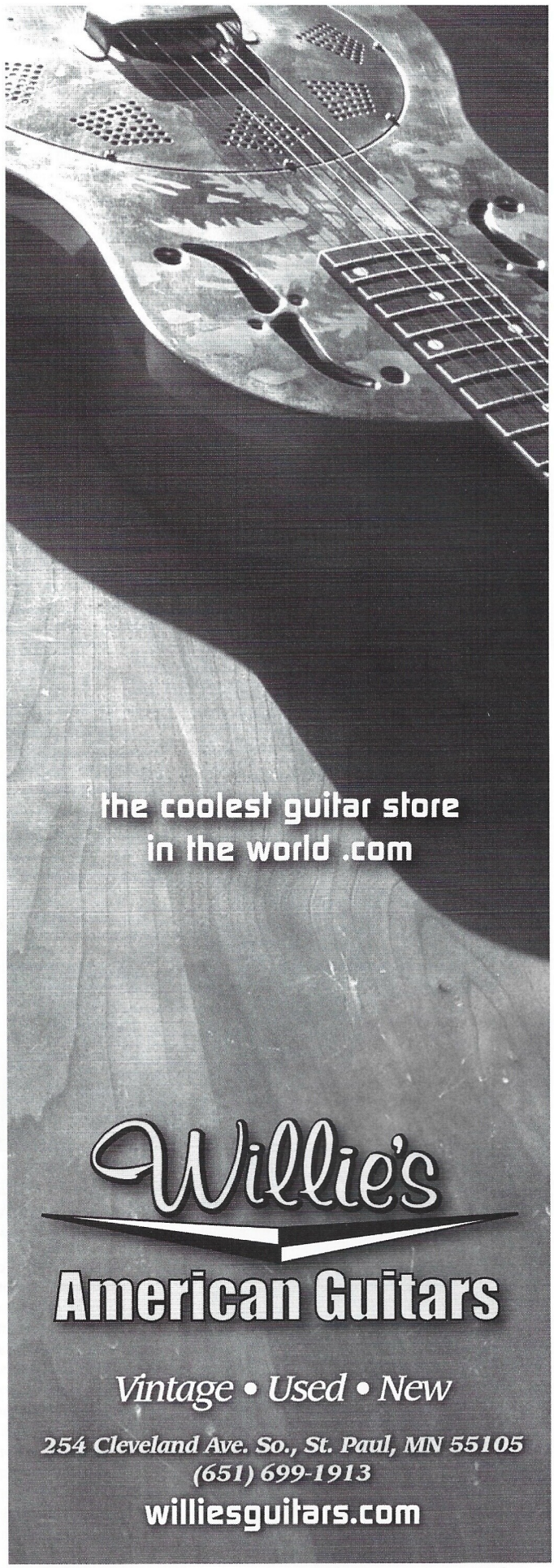
Deborah Harry

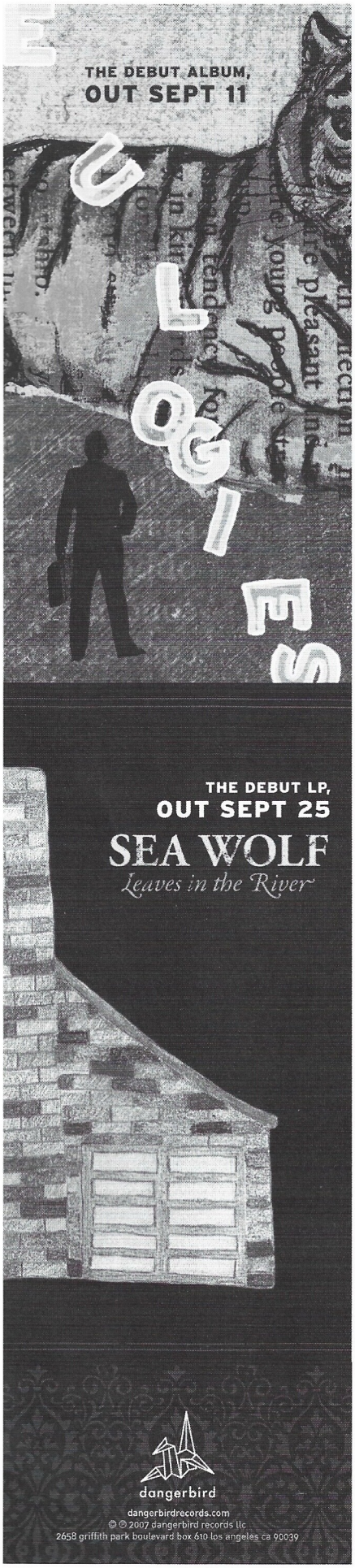
JOHN DEE HOLEMAN & THE WAIFS

JOHN DEE HOLEMAN & THE WAIFS

(MUSIC MAKER) www.musicmaker.org

The meeting of the septuagenarian Piedmont/Texas-style bluesman John Dee Holeman and nomadic Australians the Waifs wasn't a staged "young'uns meet a veteran" situation. In 2004, the folk rock group was rehearsing for a U.S. tour at the





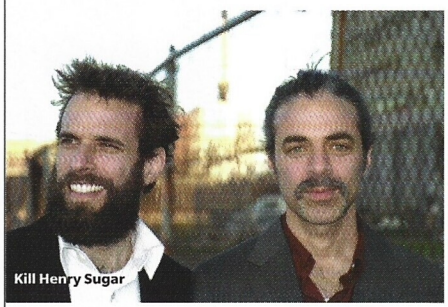
studios of Music Maker Relief Foundation, an organization that helps impoverished blues musicians. Music Maker head Tim Duffy invited Holeman over for a casual encounter, and the guitarist guided them through 11 tracks of country blues. The Waifs might not be blues experts, but they know how to bring out the subtleties of the 12-bar pattern, with solid walking basslines, guitar licks and harmonica wails. The spontaneity of the session has both advantages and setbacks. Most of the time all parties hit a groove, but some songs end before they catch fire ("John Henry") and the lack of preparation makes the last three tracks blur together with little distinction between them. MIKE SHANLEY

HOPEWELL

BEAUTIFUL TARGETS

(TEE PEE) www.teepeerecords.com

Hopewell's Jason Russo knows how to pace an album. Start out subdued, kick into the rock, crank that up a notch with a potential pop hit marked by falsetto backing vocals, take it back down on a ballad with a grandiose climax... Say—what year is this? What continent are we on? The band calls Poughkeepsie home, but *Beautiful Targets* sounds like a direct descendant of British psych rock, not unlike their labelmates the Lovetones. Two songs make Beatles and Pink Floyd allusions in the lyrics; "Monolith" recalls the Who's pop aspirations. Russo also knows how to create epics, wrapping piano arpeggios and strings around his high-pitched voice, which sounds like Thom Yorke if he warbled less. Later, the four-on-the-floor beat of "Echo & His Brother" and the hooky "Are You Anywhere?" provide a modern take on the sound without losing any of the firepower of the album's earlier highlights. MIKE SHANLEY



KILL HENRY SUGAR

SWING BACK AND DOWN

(SURPRISE TRUCK) www.surprisetruck.com

It's probably time to shelve the roots-duo format; the tipping point was reached around the time the Black Keys started to suck. Attempting to sidestep the duo curse is NYC's Kill Henry Sugar, comprising singer/fretboard whiz Erik Della Penna and drummer Dean Sharenow, who recently backed up Joan Baez and previously worked with Joan Osborne. The pair serves up a kind of stripped-down, Avett Brothers-esque blend of twang-jazz, banjo-blooze and high lonesome folk, and while their previous lo-fi sound is absent, pervasive is a low-watt vibe. Aside from the rumbling "Tammany Hall" and the modified boom-chicka rustle of "Mule Got Loose" there's not a whole lot of shakin' going' on—a potentially fatal flaw when your music is minimalist in the first place and needs to get those juices flowing. Ultimately the music seems as ambivalent as the band name—kids, put down that bong before selecting your monikers—is atrocious. FRED MILLS

KINSKI

DOWN BELOW IT'S CHAOS

(SUB POP) www.subpop.com

"Crybaby Blowout" kicks off Kinski's third full-length for Sub Pop with a sludgy-synth wedge of a guitar riff that all but eschews mood-building intros in favor of a nasty rock nugget. There is precision here, but the record is concise, clocking in at under 50 minutes. Instead of tinkering endlessly in atmospherics, these nine songs roll off like snippets from film soundtracks (often a pitfall for post-rockers), at times drab—Michael Mann could effectively be using "Boy, Was I Mad!" for a nighttime car chase—or amusing, as in the case of "Child Had To Catch a Train," with a sparkly organ straight outta *Charade*. But none better than closing track "Silent Biker Type," the record's longest and, fittingly, most patient cut, where every member reconvenes (organ balancing guitar before grinding and giving in), flawlessly capturing the eeriness of Todd Haynes's *Safe*. Who needs order? ZACHARY BLOOM

AMY LAVERE

ANCHORS & ANVILS

(ARCHER) www.archer-records.com

With a voice that's more Lisa Loeb than Loretta Lynn, Memphis singer Amy LaVere smoothly and clinically triangulates torch songs, rootsy country and dark-night-of-the-soul pop. Yet, on her second album (produced by Jim Dickinson), LaVere's flat, raspy whisper twangs a bit too *twangily* and a similarly overexerted attempt by her band (featuring Jimbo Mathus) to be as country-nostalgic as possible makes the whole disc feel like a Grand Ole Opry science project. LaVere's neither as sultry nor as clever as she thinks she is; one can almost sense the self-satisfaction she feels delivering a line like, "Killing him didn't make her love go away." The most honest moments on *Anchors* are those that reveal that creepy sort of calculation, and when held up next to her ambitious covers of Carla Thomas ("That Beat") and Bob Dylan ("I'll Remember You"), it's clear that LaVere's reach exceeds her grasp. JASON FERGUSON

LEWIS & CLARKE

BLASTS OF HOLY BIRTH

(LA SOCIÉTÉ EXPÉDITIONNAIRE) www.la-soc.com

There's something freaky and folky about Lou Rogai's languid voyages as Lewis & Clarke, but freak-folk this ain't. It's closer to Low-style slow-core burnt at the edges with woodsy psych. Rogai exhales poignant lyrics and juggles elegant

instrumentation with a revolving cast that includes members of Man Man and Rachel's. It's as sedate as past Lewis & Clarke releases, set so adrift that each song seems to last for hours. The centerpiece is the 10-minute "Before It Breaks You," a harrowing road song flecked with harp and banjo, preceded by the standout "Comfort Inn," on which Rogai borrows lyrics from Aaron Ross and enlists dreamy drones, tabla and horns. The eight tracks here are protracted and whisper-quiet yet engaging, with a constant tug of sorrow that satisfies the way the best country music does. Fans of Iron & Wine and ilk would be wise to prick up their ears. DOUG WALLEN

HARRY MANX & KEVIN BREIT

IN GOOD WE TRUST

(STONY PLAIN) www.stonyplainrecords.com

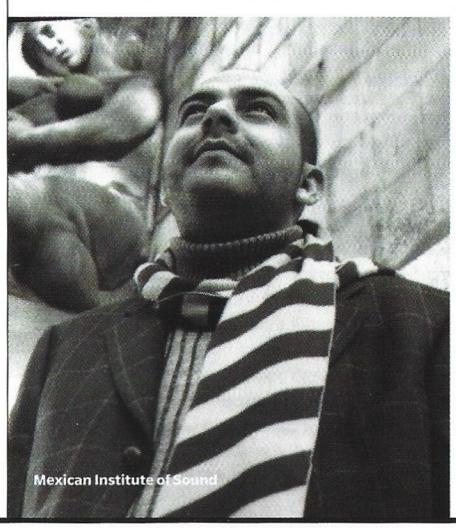
To encourage fuel conservation during World War II, posters reading "Is This Trip Really Necessary?" hung in American gas, bus and train stations. That question nags with every spin of *In Good We Trust*. Manx and Breit are accomplished and eclectic instrumentalists, and Manx has an appealing, throaty voice. But open with Springsteen's "I'm on Fire" and fill most of the rest of an album with originals, you not only invite comparison but need to emit some sparks as well. As a singer, Manx never lights up Springsteen's great song or his and Breit's significantly lesser ones. The instrumentals work better, but *Trust* moseys into the mood-dependent trap that catches up with most homey back-porch music, never passing beyond folky competence. And if they're going to insist on reviving monstrously depressing traditional songs like "Death Have Mercy," the trip is most definitely *not* necessary. RICK ALLEN

MEXICAN INSTITUTE OF SOUND

PIÑATA

(NACIONAL) www.nacionalrecords.com

By night, Camilo Lara's the one-man-band behind the Mexitronic MIS and its silly yet formidable cut-and-paste Latin electro aesthetic. By day, Lara's president of EMI Mexico signing the loverboy likes of Juan Gabriel. Which Lara you going to believe? My money's on MIS: splicing dippy spoken word interludes onto the cha-cha rhythms of "Escribeme Pronto;" tickling toy xylophones and woozy brass samples through the blue-light-special salsa of "Killer Kumbia." It's temping to think Lara's a spicier brand of Beck/Beastie as he raps atop the collage noise and splatter-hop groove of "El Microfono" or taps cowbell and races a Hammond organ's whine through the slithery soul of "A Girl Like You." But much of MIS' Game Boy blips and firecracker crackle sounds at one with (sampled maybe) Japan's Yellow Magic Orchestra. If Lara's turning Japanese and bringing that Latinismo to the world-electro table, he's one brave hombre. Ole. A.D. AMOROSI


Mexican Institute of Sound

MINUS THE BEAR

PLANET OF ICE

(SUICIDE SQUEEZE) www.suicidesqueeze.net

Minus the Bear has been plagued by descriptions such as prog-rock and math-rock, but it's not like the members write 20-minute suites about gnomes and fairies. They just play their instruments well and use complicated rhythms and time shifts. On *Planet of Ice* Minus the Bear has managed to become both more accessible and more interesting. Here, they're at their best churning out catchy, three- and four-minute songs like the driving "Knights" and the occasionally explosive ballad ("When We Escape"). If they're a prog band, they're one of the few that works off-beat ideas into actual songs instead of the other way around. They do go off the rails on occasion—see the extended solo on "Lotus" that sounds like it was borrowed from a Pink Floyd cover band—but for most part, Minus the Bear manages to nicely split the difference between Rush and Fugazi. HAL BIENSTOCK

MIRAH & SPECTRATONE INTERNATIONAL

SHARE THIS PLACE: STORIES AND OBSERVATIONS

(K) www.krecs.com

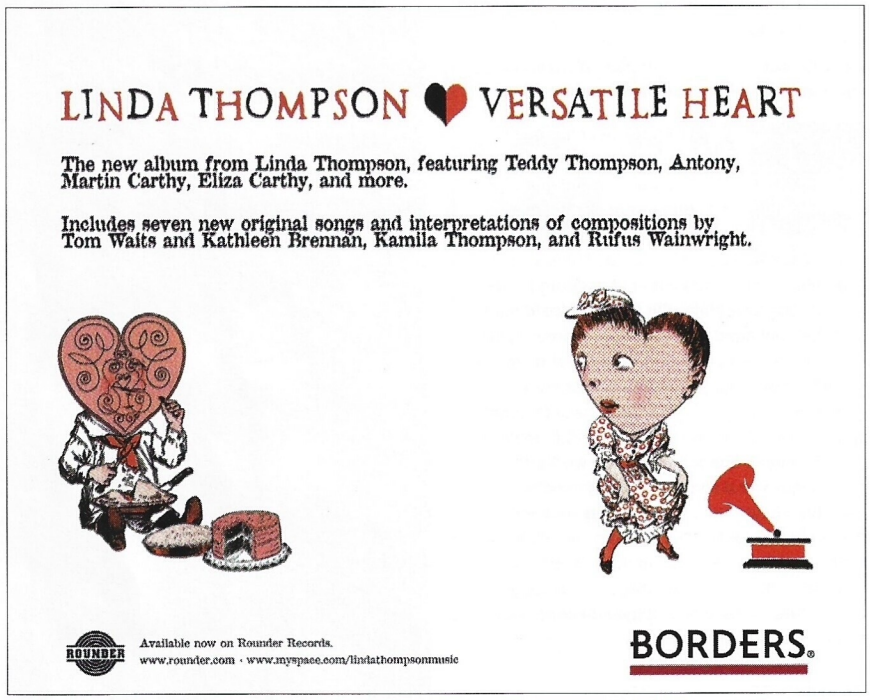
She's like Björk for the people on this planet. Possessed of a girlish silky sweet voice like Jolie Holland and Juliana Hatfield's love child, Mirah's fluttering vocals alight over graceful, understated music that rings with crisp immediacy, thanks in large part to producer/long-time collaborator Phil Elvrum of the Microphones. The instrumentation (percussion, accordion, cello and lute) blends cabaret bustle ("Credo Cigalia") with gypsy shamble ("Supper"), offering an appropriately dramatic backdrop for Mirah's tender odes. Some are childishly gentle, hiding thoughtful lyrics ("Community"); others feature an almost jazz-pop sway (the airy "Luminescence"). The highlight of the disc's dozen tracks is "Song of Psyche," which relates the tale of her grudge match with Aphrodite. The traditional instrumentation lends an old world quality that, with Mirah's lissome theatricality, transports the listener. The songs in particular feel cut from whole cloth such that when the album ends, it's like the lights coming up in the movie theater. CHRIS PARKER

ABRA MOORE

ON THE WAY

(SARATHAN) www.sarathan.com

At first glance, it seems like Austin singer-songwriter Abra Moore still lives in an era where Natalie Imbruglia is "Torn" and Lilith Fair is the biggest event of the summer. With the girlish trill of Lisa Loeb and a little Alanis Morissette wail, *On the Way* is like strolling back to the '90s where breathy girl-rock was at its height. But despite the obvious throwbacks, *On the Way* is a nice album, lyrical and mellow with an ethereal quality reminiscent of Sarah McLachlan. With vocalist Will Sexton on backup and Ephrain Owens adding a jazzy touch on the trumpet, the record is a collection of lushly arranged meditations, evocatively written and brimming with feeling. Moore's only commercial hit was 1997's "Four Leaf Clover," and her latest certainly won't be a chart topper, but there's something to be said for an artist sticking to her roots and not letting the MTV girl-pop craze run her over. ALLIE GOOLRICK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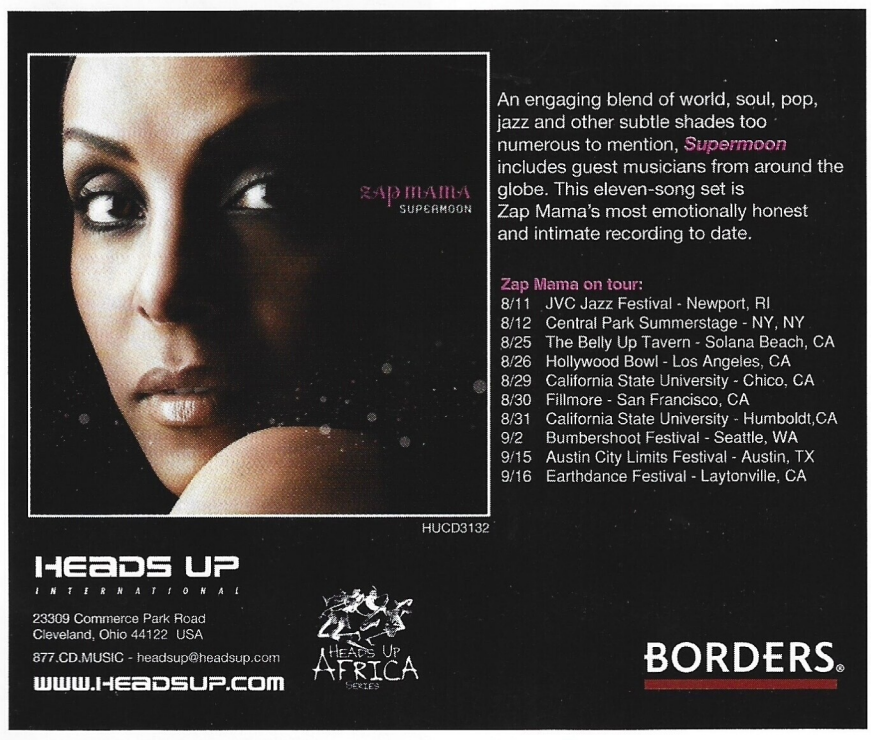
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MUSHROOM WITH EDDIE GALE

JOINT HAPPENING

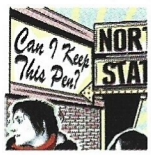
(HYENA) www.hyenarecords.com

San Fran psych collective Mushroom, dedicated to keeping alive the cosmic-consciousness-infused instrumental rock and jazz of the late 1960s and early 1970s, has found a worthy soul mate in trumpeter Eddie Gale. He released two fine jazz albums on Blue Note back in the day, *Black Rhythm Happening* and *Ghetto Music*, that were by turns spiritual, political, clashingly avant-garde and propulsively groovin'. Here, Mushroom uses Gale most often to visit the kind of muted-interior quiet places explored so well by Miles Davis on "In a Silent Way." But this band adds a hip sensibility through use of restrained guitar, Mellotron and upfront percussion. There's nothing dated or retro about such music—it's now as classic as Chicago blues or bebop. At the same time, it's good to hear Gale and 'Shroom get some fiery steam going and break free of respectfulness, as they do during the18-minute "I Was Torn Down at the Dance Place, Shaved Head at the Organ." STEVEN ROSEN

NORTHERN STATE

CAN I KEEP THIS PEN?

(IPECAC) www.ipecac.com



Don't let the old-school hip-hop flavor of lead-off track "Mic Tester" fool you. Northern State is out to try some new adventures on the trio's first release since leaving Sony, starting with production by Chuck Brody of Shitake Monkey and Beastie Boy Ad-rock. The gals simulate a club mix of early Elastica on "Better Already," romp like the B-52's bringing punk to the love shack on "Cold War," and bask in Kaki King's ethereal guest vocals on the atmospheric "Fall Apart." They even go electro-folk on one song. But for all its detours, this is unmistakably a Northern State release, packed with their patented Beastie Girls swagger, including such highlights as Hesta Prynn boasting "I don't give a fuck if I rap like a white girl." That's exactly how she raps, of course. But in a good way. ED MASLEY

ODD NOSDAM

LEVEL LIVE WIRES

DJ MAYONNAISE

STILL ALIVE

(ANTICON) www.anticon.com

The Anticon kids predated the whole Americanahiphoptronica sound by a good half a decade, and these two records, while dissimilar, only further the label's unfadeable, idiosyncratic *raison d'être*. Odd Nosdam, formerly the quirky cumulus behind cLOUDDEAD, sparkles with his new *Level Live Wires*, a blip-hop garage sale of samplers, analog synth, field recordings, and good old fashioned cratedig-gin'. It even features TV on the Radio's Tunde Adebimpe, which ought to help sell an extra thousand records along the way.

DJ Mayonnaise, who pushed the whole shelf life

thing to the max with an eight-year lag between his debut *55 Stories* and his new platter, returns with an incredibly dense, time-compacted side of sheetrock-in', heavy on the samples and subtle scratch. As with the Nosdam disc, there's a subtlety here which comes less from DJ battles and more from those skirmishes of the personal variety. People often wonder what will happen when hip-hop truly reaches middle age. Nasty 'Nos and DJ Mayo suggest the question's moot if you never tried to be what you were not in the first place. TIMOTHY C. DAVIS

OLIVER FUTURE

PAX FUTURA

(FIREPROOF) www.fireproofrecording.com

If you've even marginally been keeping tabs on the music biz, you know that record sales are in the toilet. What kind of fool—especially one with a long history in the industry—starts a record label in this climate? One listen to *Pax Futura*, the debut album from Oliver Future, and you'd probably make the same decision as Adam Lasus, indie producer extraordinaire (Clap Your Hands Say Yeah, Yo La Tengo, Clem Snide, etc.), who recorded the album and then started a label to release it. In the age of MySpace singles and downloads, he and the band have done the unthinkable – they've created a bona fide album where tracks segue seamlessly and flow start to finish. Teeter-tottering between the sweeping cinematics of Coldplay and the sing-songy swagger of the Walkmen, *Pax Futura* is a thoroughly enjoyable (if not wholly unique) joyride of an album. BARBARA MITCHELL

THE PRETTY THINGS

BALBOA ISLAND

(ZOHO ROOTS) www.zohomusic.com

This is the record the Rolling Stones should make. The Pretty Things, whose guitarist Dick Taylor played with Mick and Keith in the early '60s, open *Balboa Island* with a garage rock reminiscence that includes a sly reference to the Libertines redux band the Dirty Pretty Things and a dose of the rowdy edge that marked early signature tunes such as "Rosalyn" and "Don't Bring Me Down." Most of *Balboa Island* looks back to the Pretties' original sources of inspiration, especially to American Delta blues—whether overtly, on "(Blues For) Robert Johnson," or obliquely, as on "The Ballad Of Hollis Brown" (the lone cover). Vocalist Phil May sounded wizened and evil in '64; four-plus decades later, he sounds wiser but still threatening, and the band, most of whom have been Pretties since the '60s, still rocks, without seeming desperate to sound relevant. STEVE KLINGE

RECOIL

SUBHUMAN

(MUTE) www.mute.com

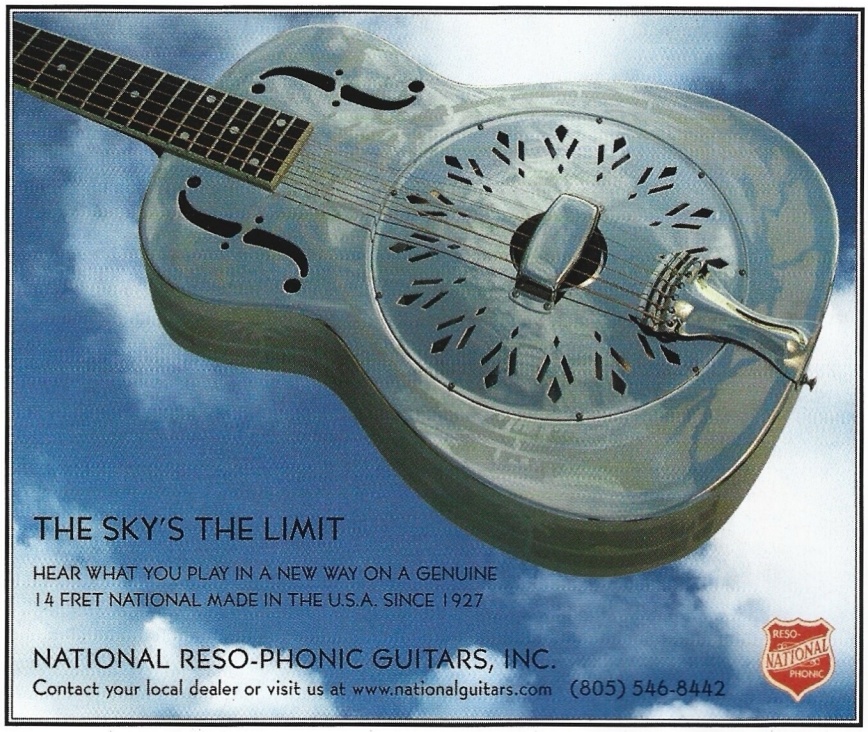
Warmth and grit are perhaps the last two sonic attributes one would expect from Alan Wilder, a man who spent more than a decade as a member of Depeche Mode. Through the course of his work under the Recoil moniker, however, he has staked out an aural territory that has seen progressively more of both of those things added to his synthetic programming mix. *Subhuman*, the fifth Recoil album, ironically stands as both his most digitally advanced and organically evocative work yet. The rough-edged vocal work of Louisiana blues singer Joe Richardson is both a shocking contrast to expectations and a surprisingly effective complement to the disc's darker soundscapes; the mellifluous, Kate Bush-isms of Carla Trevaskis are a little more predictable, but no less effective. *Subhuman* is as swampy and spooky as it is sweetly ethereal, and it's Wilder's unique vision that renders it so. JASON FERGUSON

DAX RIGGS

WE SING OF ONLY BLOOD OR LOVE

(FAT POSSUM) www.fatpossum.com

Dax Riggs is like David Bowie in the *The Man Who Fell to Earth*: an alien not belonging, a stranger trapped in a strange land. The casualty of a broken home, swamp-gothic singer-songwriter Riggs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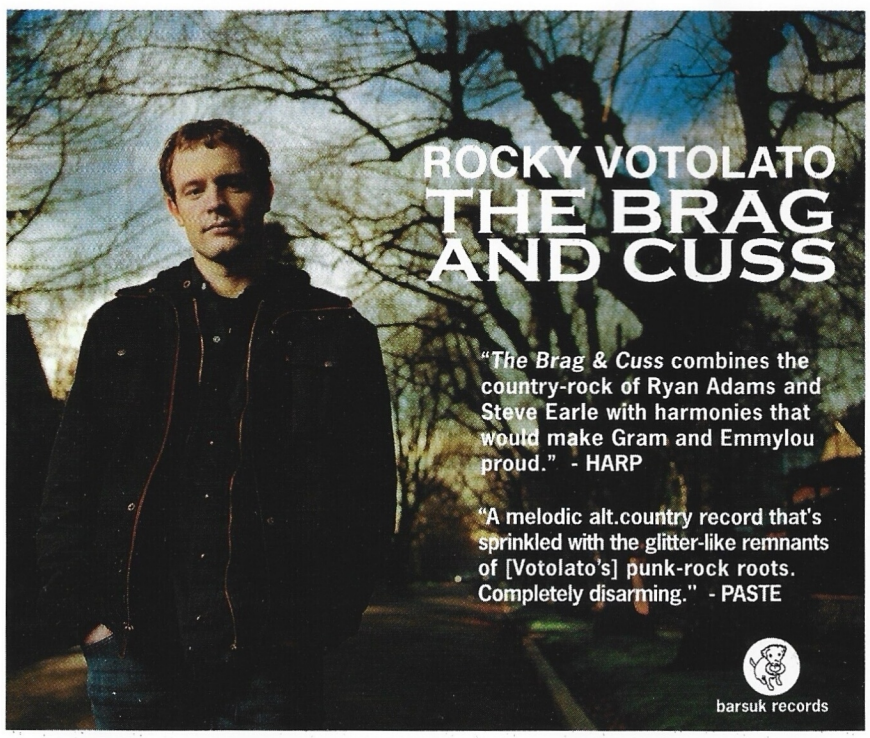
ROCKY VOTOLATO
THE BRAG AND CUSS
"The Brag & Cuss combines the country-rock of Ryan Adams and Steve Earle with harmonies that would make Gram and Emmylou proud." - HARP
"A melodic alt.country record that's sprinkled with the glitter-like remnants of [Votolato's] punk-rock roots. Completely disarming." - PASTE
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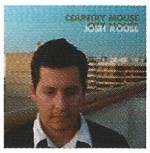
alternated between his Jehovah's Witness mother and a liberal-minded father living in Louisiana, before finding his emotional niche on earth. He formed extraterrestrial Delta folk/blues-inspired duo Deadboy & the Elephantmen before embarking on his first solo flight. Here, his conflicting though highly expressionistic DNA, patterned from a strand of Nick Cave's receding hairline, runs deep and to the bone (not unlike Grinderman). From the snarling hellfire of "Demon Tied to a Chair in My Brain" to the poetic deliverance of "Didn't Know Yet What I'd Know When I Was Bleedin'" to the R&B/gospel-rooted muscle of "Radiation Blues," Riggs unearths hair-raising revelations of a pained outsider trying to avoid material trappings and overcome the metaphysical despair of a Ziggy-like alter-ego. RON BALLY

JOSH ROUSE

COUNTRY MOUSE, CITY HOUSE

(BEDROOM CLASSICS) www.joshrouse.com



Josh Rouse is on a roll. Since 2002, he has released five stellar records and carved out a contradictory niche—a nostalgic sound that becomes more modern with each album. *Country Mouse, City House,* released on his Bedroom Classics imprint, is no exception. Rouse blends the soulful '70s with a contemporary touch, resulting in his own unique vibe. The slow, jazzy groove of "Italian Dry Ice" combines a '70s-style backbeat with a modern brass arrangement. "Nice to Fit In" mixes a garage-band guitar riff anchored by a subtle horn section. "London Bridges" is a more straightforward ballad, but one of his strongest metaphors to date. The real kicker, though, is "Hollywood Bass Player," a smart, catchy number that the Band might have recorded if they'd hung out at Studio 54 rather than at Big Pink. In fact, Rouse may be a modern-day Robbie Robertson, a prolific songwriter who mines the past only to become a musical pioneer. ROB THORMEYER

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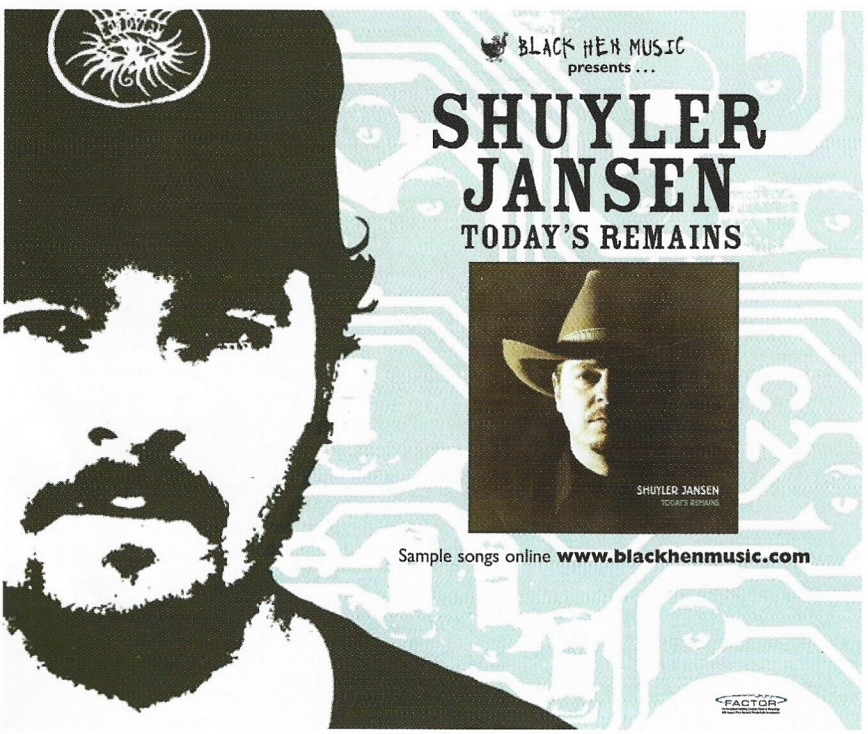
Dax Riggs

XAVIER RUDD

WHITE MOTH

(ANTI-) www.anti.com

Like Ben Harper without the earnest wordiness or Jack Johnson sans the surf and the bananas, Xavier Rudd goes about his business of smoothly rollicking folkjazzreggaefunk with some sense of conscience. *Some sense* because the crème fraîche-and-sand-coated vocalist never ladles his message too thickly across his lollygagging but groove-a-licious melodies. Save "Message Stick." That's a tad heavy. Maybe Rudd's lightness of being stems from the fact that many of his concerns are Australian in nature. Rudd even has Aboriginal vocalists along for his rough-hewn-still-lilting ride; an impressive infectious sway nicely honed from the improvisational largesse of his gigs. But you don't have to be from the outback to understand the plight of "Land Rights" and you don't have to stare into desert skies to hold close the spiritualism behind "Stargaze"—and you don't have to be anything but awake to know the selves the introspective "Come Back" peers into. A.D. AMOROSI

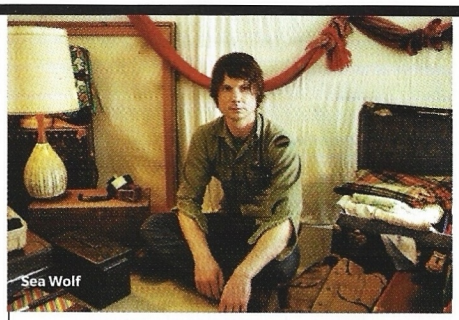


ULRICH SCHNAUSS

GOODBYE

(DOMINO) www.dominorecordco.com

In the course of a few albums Berlin's Ulrich Schnauss moved from the quietly epic (*Far Away Trains Passing By*) and the spectrally groovy (*A Strangely Isolated Place*) to something less moving and more obvious in *Goodbye*. That's not a bad thing. With his background in Germany's minimal tech-house scene a little bit of Technicolor oomph may have been necessary to pull Schnauss' muted bell-ringing atmo-


Sea Wolf

spheres and angelic voice out from under their blanketed somnolence. But other than the diabolically downturned chords changes "Medusa," so much of the grand elegant *Goodbye* sounds like Vangelis at his most victorious as produced by Trevor Horn. It's a happy swelling with sets of heavenly pipes wound through the cumulous clouds of "Shine" and "Stars." And the unified ring of guitars and chiming synthesizers create a winner's uplift. Maybe *Goodbye* needed a bit of what Lou Reed called magic and loss. Cheer down, Ulrich. A.D. AMOROSI

SEA WOLF

GET TO THE RIVER BEFORE IT GETS TOO LOW

(DANGERBIRD) www.dangerbirdrecords.com

Real life wanderer Alex Brown Church, aka Sea Wolf, threads his songs with themes of escape and the bittersweet qualities of being away. On "You're a Wolf," the opener of his five-song EP, a hag tells the singer to "get out of this town." Subsequent tracks concern long-distance relationships and a young man shaking free of family history. The line that most suggests settling down—"I might just stay here with you"—appears on a track entitled "I Don't Know If I'll Be Back This Time." The storytelling and rich instrumentation may yield Shins comparisons, but Sea Wolf's spirit is more rustic. You picture his characters, which include gypsies and murdered brothers, in the sepia tones of old-timey photos. Cellos and violins can fill out music to near-epic proportions, and the swell of strings and hope on "I Made a Resolution" bring to mind Sufjan Stevens, but Church, thank goodness, isn't as grandiose. CRYSTAL K. WIEBE

THE SHARP THINGS

A MOVEABLE FEAST

(BAR/NONE) www.bar-none.com

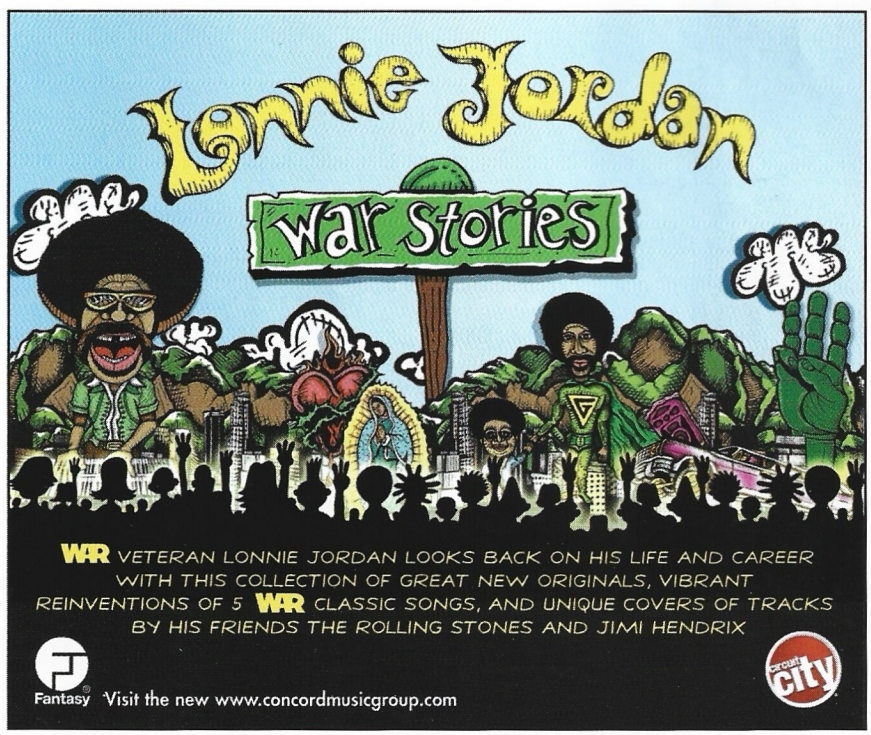
It's fitting that Tony award-winning Broadway star Michael Cerveris belts out the vocals on the opening track to the new Sharp Things album. On their third full-length, New York's favorite 10-plus-member chamber-pop outfit have crafted a record that's as theatrical and ambitious as the group itself. Songs like "Through With Love" and "An Ocean Part Deux"—with their sweeping melodies and tasteful drama—would be more at home on Broadway than in Brooklyn; others, like "Don't U Leave Me This Way" and "Don't Hold Out Hope," effortlessly evoke Bacharach's breezy pop. Ringleader Perry Serpa has an eye for detail and a knack for storytelling. Whether he's spinning yarns about being down and out in London ("Bureau de Change"), good-natured stalking ("What's The New Girl Wonder") or moment of solitude in the Big Apple ("Driving In Manhattan In My Car"), you'll find yourself swept up and away into another more polished and cinematic world. BARBARA MITCHELL

STABILISERS

WANNA DO THE WILD PLASTIC BRANE LOVE THING?

(WICKED COOL) www.wickedcoolrecords.com

Ya gotta hand it to arena rock star/TV icon/garage music goombah Little Steven. Like freshly prepared calamari, he smells tasty music from an ocean away. His latest appetizer, the indefinable Stabilisers, blend angular, mid-'60s garage crud with in-your-face insolence and the high-octane energy of late-'70s punk without coming across as a bloated reunion band thrashing thru the studded leather motions. These elder British geezers make Billy Childish whine like a hormonal teenager-in-heat with the obvious crossbreeding of the three-chord majesty of the Clash, Buzzcocks and Milkshakes and the dirty, stun guitar snarl of Chocolate Watchband, Sonics and Seeds. From the stabbing rhythm guitar of "Do the Brane" to the slimy Prisoners-meets-Sham 69 mod-core of "She Wants It All The Time" to the genre-transcending recklessness of album standout "The Way She Is," the Stabilisers bash out the jams and take no hostages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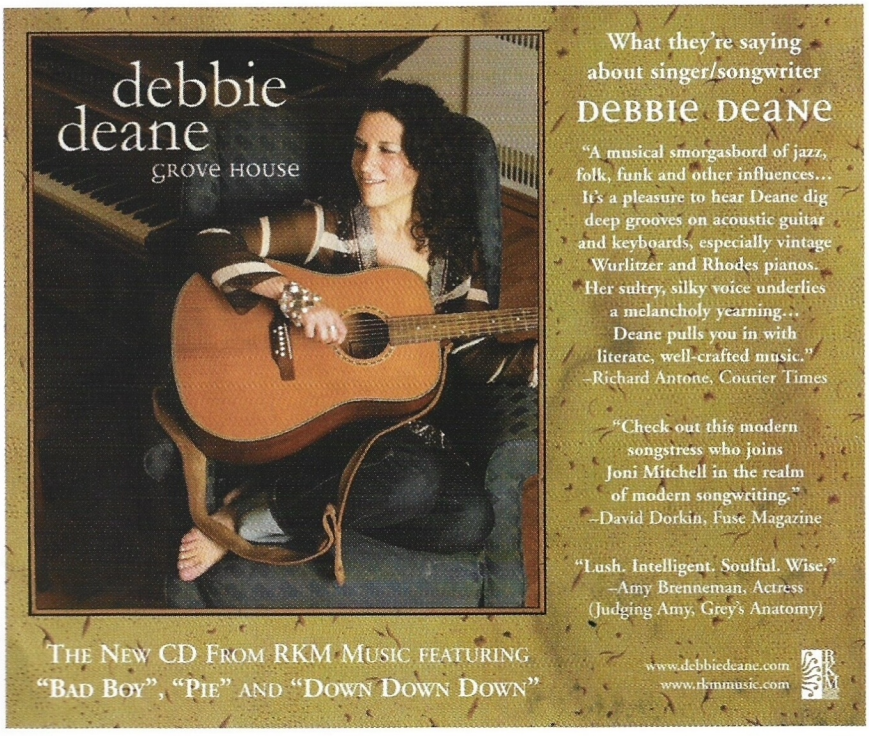
like 40-something-year-old juvenile delinquents without a care in the world. RON BALLY

STEEP CANYON RANGERS

LOVIN' PRETTY WOMEN

(REBEL) www.rebelrecords.com

Their fine third release for Rebel finds young outfit Steep Canyon Rangers still making modern bluegrass with a traditional sound. That sound manifests itself in classic, hard-driving style ("Lovin' Pretty Women"), plaintive balladry ("Call the Captain," a lament about life in the coal mines), one nondescript instrumental ("Kuykendall"), and a little gospel ("Be Still Moses"). While their new one is a bit more straightforwardly bluegrass than their last, the band again puts the "neo" in "neo-traditional" by choosing to forgo renditions of standards from the bluegrass canon, relying instead on their own pens and a lone cover of the Dead's version of the trad tune "Don't Ease Me In." They give a nod of a different sort to tradition with their own barn-burner "Picking on Josh," a tribute to legendary dobro player Uncle Josh Graves. The Rangers continue to honor the spirit of what went before while seeking to carry it forward. STUART MUNRO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deane
GROVE HOUSE
What they're saying
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"A musical smorgasbord of jazz, folk, funk and other influences... It's a pleasure to hear Deane dig deep grooves on acoustic guitar and keyboards, especially vintage Wurlitzer and Rhodes pianos. Her sultry, silky voice underlies a melancholy yearning... Deane pulls you in with literate, well-crafted music."
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"Check out this modern songstress who joins Joni Mitchell in the realm of modern songwriting."
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JOHN P. STROHM

EVERYDAY LIFE

(SUPERPHONIC) www.superphonicrecords.com

For most tracks on *Everyday Life*, John P. Strohm of the Blake Babies plays to the Stonesier side of alternative country, at times recalling Cracker while making the most of his everyman vocals and plain-spoken narrative style. But he changes it up here just often enough to keep things from feeling too comfortable, kicking off with a mid-tempo rocker that toughens up a chorus hook he may not even know he borrowed from the Kinks song "Don't Forget To Dance," and going semi-psychedelic with a Beatlesque descending riff on "Rise and Shine." The title track is a power-pop treasure from the Teenage Fanclub side of town, but the highlight is probably "Anna," an aching, acoustic-guitar-driven tribute to his kid that somehow manages to sidestep everything that tends to suck about those kinds of songs. ED MASLEY

SETH TIVEN

SOLITUDE

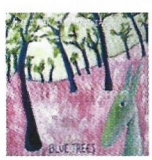
(SELF-RELEASED) www.sethtiven.com

This is the debut solo release from Seth Tiven, cofounder of '80s college-rock janglemeisters Dumptruck. According to Tiven, it started out as the next Dumptruck record—a current version of the band plays behind him on it, and other former Dumptruckers chip in as well—but he felt that the music veered in a different enough direction that it made sense to release the results under his own name. There are a few wrinkles here and there; midway, the mandolin and clarinet instrumental "Sechelt" provides a cool interstice. For the most part, though, the music resides in the rock end of the alternative country pool, dominated by mid-tempo minor-key offerings, crunchy chords and swooping slide guitar, with occasional touches of forlorn pedal steel and Tiven's melancholic warble sounding like a second cousin to Neil Young's. It probably isn't anything you haven't heard before, but Tiven will make you enjoy hearing it again. STUART MUNRO

MICK TURNER / TREN BROTHERS

BLUE TREES

(DRAG CITY) www.dragcity.com



Dirty Three guitarist Mick Turner makes music for traveling through the desert—parched, stark, and expansive, as glimpsed through the shimmering refraction of rising road haze. The guitar tones resonate like a vine-ripened strawberry tossed into a rippling pond, enveloping these instrumental tracks in sweet, sonorous warmth. *Blue Trees* collects some of Turner's rare, compilation and limited edition releases, both solo and with Dirty Three drummer Jim White (under the name Tren Brothers). The music's supple and entrancing like the band, but not nearly as sub-

sumed in the dark, melancholy shadow of D3. Instead, the tracks have a light, airy, loping feel, like Ennio Morricone playing cards with Neil Halstead (Slowdive, Mojave 3), suffused with an alluring grace and gentle sway, easily breezing by. And despite its odds-&-sods nature, it all fits together nicely. CHRIS PARKER

UNKLE

WAR STORIES

(SURRENDER ALL) www.unkle.com

The face of the Supergroup has changed, trading Flying V guitars and armadillo-packed trousers for turntables, sequencers and an impressive address book of rock luminaries. UNKLE's debut album, 1998's *Psyence Fiction*, introduced the world to the powerhouse pairing of DJ Shadow and Mo' Wax label head James Lavelle, culling everything from trip-hop to downbeat electronica. *War Stories* packs in guests ranging from Josh Homme to Autolux to the Duke Spirit. While Lavelle's "end is nigh" gloom remains intact, *War Stories* injects a little subtlety—a quality largely absent from the dystopic sci-fi sound of the debut. The Cult's Ian Astbury pops in on "Burn My Shadow," painting a Lee Hazelwood sunset over a volcanic landscape around the Thunderdome. Recorded in part at Rancho de la Luna studios with co-production credit going to Masters of Reality's Chris Gross, this could easily be typecast as Lavelle's rock record. It's the cross pollination, however, which keeps an otherwise tired trip-hop cliché relevant. MIKE MCKEE

VARIOUS ARTISTS

AMERICANA

(PUTUMAYO) www.putumayo.com

The latest release from Putumayo World Music in its American Music series, *Americana* collects tracks from a talented group of artists, including longtime standouts (Robert Earl Keen, Tim O'Brien), established performers (Terri Hendrix, Josh Ritter), recently-emerged stars (the Norah-with-the-twang-turned-up Little Willies), up-and-comers (Eliza Lynn, Old Crow Medicine Show), and, oddly, even an act (Mulehead) that disbanded three years ago. As a listening experience, the compilation is pleasant enough. But given the predominance of folky, singer-songwriter fare, it's less successful in giving a sense of either the distinctive character or the range claimed for Americana by the accompanying liner notes (part of an attractive package that include mini-bios on each of the featured performers). Maybe the inclusion of additional tracks—there are 12 songs here, using just over half of a CD's available space—would have helped in that regard; maybe not. STUART MUNRO

VOLTRESS

ANTELOPES

(SHORTWAVE) www.shortwaverecords.com

A sticker on this handsome 180-gram vinyl edition proclaims Voltress' *Antelopes* "one of the most important releases of the decade," picking up "where [Miles Davis'] *Bitches Brew* left off." Oh, the blasphemy. Take the Voltress challenge and receive a half-hour of excruciating music, the kind of pretentious, purposeless cacophony that hatches when indie-rockers who can't play exploit funk veterans and free-jazzers who can. The guests—who hopefully got paid up front—include avant-garde saxist Roscoe Mitchell, P-Funk synth legend Bernie Worrell, bassist Richard Davis and Chicago trumpeter Corey Wilkes. They do their best to concoct Arkestra-style insanity, but the remainder of the ensemble grinds and noodles both overlong tracks into lockstep-vamp hell. The self-indulgence doesn't end there in the overdubbed melee: Voltress ringleader Eric Hartz lays sharp-tongued personal voice mails over the whole shebang (including those from neighbors complaining about the noise—go figure). Chase this with a Louis Armstrong record if you want to recover. EVAN HAGA

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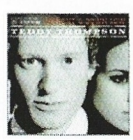
Fionn Regan *The End of History* This stunning record from the Irish folk singer offers an eclectic array of pastoral ballads, plaintive melodies, and exquisite vocals.



Teddy Thompson *Upfront & Down Low* The indie artist celebrates country music with heartfelt covers of classics by legends like George Jones, Merle Haggard, and Dolly Parton.

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PHIL MARINO

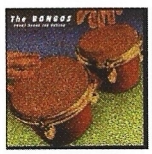
A CABLE TO HEAVEN

The Great Pop Land Rush of the early '80s included Hoboken's Bongos.

THE BONGOS

DRUMS ALONG THE HUDSON-SPECIAL EDITION

(COOKING VINYL) www.cookingvinylusa.com



The Bongos only enjoyed a brief (1979-86) tenure, but those in the know have long ranked the Hoboken outfit alongside peer groups R.E.M., Let's Active and the dB's. In '82 the trio issued their long-playing debut *Drums Along the Hudson* (PVC Records) to huge critical acclaim and constant college radio rotation—they'd later expand to a quartet, sign with RCA and issue two more records. Bursting at the seams with the irrepressibly fresh-scrubbed energy of guitarist/songwriter Richard Barone, bassist Rob Norris and drummer Frank Giannini, *Drums* is a nonstop sonic rush ablaze with jittery garage rock ("In the Congo"), anthemic postpunk (the spikey Wire-like "Video Eyes") and lush, jangly pop (the modal-tinged, Byrds-meets-Television "Zebra Club."

Plus, among the Great Pop Land Rush of the Early '80s, few songs stand out quite so memorably—and connect so viscerally—as "The Bulrushes," a masterpiece of the 2 ½-minute artform. The tune ushers forth on a descending 12-string riff, murmurs sweet warm lyric inscrutables (Biblical imagery of baby Moses, unleavened bread and a cable that "reaches up to heaven") and ultimately explodes in an endorphin rush of electric guitar and Everlys-styled harmonies.

"The Bulrushes" alone buys the band iconic status, and indeed, no less a tastemaker than Moby recognized exactly that: In addition to this Special Edition's bonus archival material (unreleased single "Nuts & Bolts"; two tracks cut live in London '81 with guests Throbbing Gristle; eight lo-fi live tracks from '79) is "Bulrushes 2007," recorded last year by a reunited Barone, Norris and Giannini with Moby producing and playing various instruments. It doesn't top the original but it does underscore the tune's lingering brilliance—and this platter's ageless qualities, too. FRED MILLS

LOVE

THE BLUE THUMB RECORDINGS

(HIP-O SELECT) www.hip-oselect.com

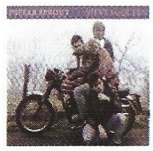
After the commercial failure of 1968's *Forever Changes*, mercurial Love leader Arthur Lee fired his bandmates, assembled a new lineup, and began recording lots of material, some of which was culled for *Four Sail*, Love's 1969 swansong for Elektra Records. The remaining tracks from that session became *Out Here*, a double album released in December 1969 on Blue Thumb. Eschewing the baroque flourishes of *Forever Changes*, *Out Here* emphasized rootsy, bluesy material, ranging from the sublime (the heavy "Signed D.C."; the delicate "Listen To My Song") to the excessive ("Doggone," which includes an eight-minute drum solo). *The Blue Thumb Recordings* also includes a collection of previously unreleased performances from Love's 1970 tour of England and the 1971 album *False Start*, notable in part for "The Everlasting First," a collaboration with Jimi Hendrix. This limited-to-5,000-copies three-CD set offers scattered evidence of the late Lee's timeless genius amid much excellent, albeit time-bound, Vietnam-era psychedelic rock. STEVE KLINGE

PREFAB SPROUT

STEVE MCQUEEN: LEGACY EDITION

(SONY BMG/ LEGACY)

www.legacyrecordings.com

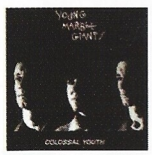


Swoon might've been more sweetly impenetrable and *From Langley Park to Memphis* more direct. But when it comes to nailing the un-nail-ible Cole Porter-on-Percocet pop prickle of opaque wordsmith/singer Paddy McAloon and the kinky sophistication of Prefab Sprout, 1985's *Steve McQueen* hits it. Long before Morrissey set human frailty so cynically wittily to paper, McAloon and his crew—along with producer Thomas Dolby and his icy layering synths—managed glowing pop-jazz that stuck to the deadliest of sins like peanut butter on rice. Stories of lust and avarice and even country music knock-offs ("Faron") were precious without losing the necessary muscularity to drive McAloon's melodies and airy voice forward. But McAloon did something that Moz couldn't do until after the Smiths: make stately pop as richly complex as "Moving the River." That's what the second disc of *Steve*'s skeletal acoustic versions show off: the McAloon brand diagrammed. Too perfect. A.D. AMOROSI

YOUNG MARBLE GIANTS

COLOSSAL YOUTH

(DOMINO) www.dominorecordsco.com



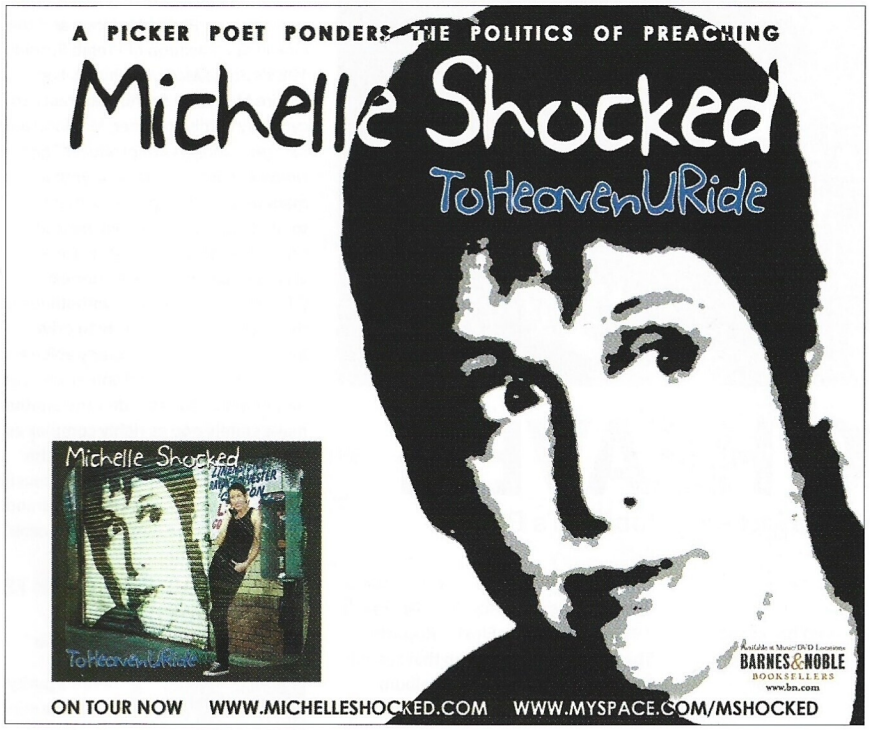
There's a purity about the minimalist, stripped-down aesthetic of this band that's positively beguiling, and despite their lack of volume, the Giants were as anarchic and DIY in their own way as any of those outfits that formed in the wake of Britain's punk explosion. This two-disc set brings together all the tracks released during the Giants' brief (1978-80) career — 1980's *Colossal Youth* album; EP, single, and compilation tracks; plus the demos that appeared on the 2000 release *Salad Days*. (There's also a limited edition 3-CD version featuring the band's 1980 John Peel Sessions appearance.) The pulsating bass, snatches of guitar, swirling organ, and occasional drum machine beats leave plenty of room for Alison Statton's light, cool vocals to float around on top, but there's something vaguely ominous about the band's delivery as well, as if they're privy to a secret they're almost-but-not-quite willing to share with you. It's the kind of mystique that cult followings are made of. GILLIAN G. GAAR

NINA SIMONE

JUST LIKE A WOMAN: SINGS CLASSIC SONGS OF THE 1960S

(RCA/LEGACY) www.legacyrecordings.com

Culled from various releases spanning the 1960s and '70s, this collection aptly demonstrates not only Nina Simone's refusal to be musically pigeonholed (blues, jazz, protest, soul, pop, gospel), but also her extraordinary talent for stripping a song down to its core and refashioning it as something wholly original. Simone often approached the material of Bob Dylan, but the examples provided here offer particularly unique takes: "Just Like A Woman" is transformed into a jazzy torch lament and "I Shall Be Released" is given a gospel swagger, while "Just Like Tom Thumb's Blues" pulsates with English folk stylings akin to Nick Drake or Fairport Convention. Barry Gibb's "In the Morning" gets the gospel treatment—a complete renovation from its baroque pop origins—and Simone's live reading of "To Love Somebody" swings more than the Bee Gees' take. Simone also overhauls "House of the Rising Sun," and offers noteworthy renditions of "Here Comes the Sun," "Suzanne" and "The Pusher." EDWARD BURCH



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THE SOFT MACHINE

THE SOFT MACHINE VOLUME TWO

(WATER) www.runtdistribution.com/water.html

Released in 1968 and '69, the first two albums by the Soft Machine forcefully delineated this Canterbury, England, band's character and, with personnel changes from one to the next, gave a glimpse of the constant flux that was to follow. With nearly all subsequent albums sequentially numbered, their debut is sometimes referred to as *Volume One*, but it's actually self-titled. Initially a trio of Robert Wyatt (drums, vocals), Mike Ratledge (keyboards) and Kevin Ayers (guitar, bass, vocals), the latter soon departed, replaced by bass player Hugh Hopper for *Volume Two*. That shift moved the band from gently fractured psych-drenched folk-pop ditties to a more robust instrumental onslaught that drew more comfortably from jazz improvisational motifs; though Ayers' songs can be powerfully hypnotic, his bass playing was generally not strong enough. However, both discs remain vital works, and after years of lackluster reissues, they've finally been given the care they deserve, in every regard. DAVID GREENBERGER

SONIC YOUTH

DAYDREAM NATION DELUXE EDITION

(GEFFEN) www.geffen.com

You shouldn't need *Harp* to tell you how great *Daydream Nation* is. If you don't know already, or if you've forgotten, go listen immediately. You can check it out at the Library of Congress if you're inclined; it recently enshrined the album. Better yet, check this expanded edition, complete with a handful of covers (Beefheart, Beatles, Mudhoney, Neil Young) and live versions of all the songs captured in concert around the time of the album's October 1988 release. Sure, we can argue the relative merits of *Sister*, *Daydream*'s noisier predecessor and perhaps its equal; we can parse the drug references in the lyrics and the record's place in the tradition of punk double albums (these issues and others surface in the various essays that accompany this two-CD set). But from the accessible rocker "Teenage Riot," still thrilling after all these years, to the experimental found sounds of "Providence," *Daydream Nation* is unquestionably, to deploy a much-abused term, *seminal*. Of course, you knew that. STEVE KLINGE

EDITED BY RANDY HARWARD

Roky rocks

DEMON ANGEL

The strange, sad saga of Roky Erickson as seen through the eye of the lens.

YOU'RE GONNA MISS ME: A FILM ABOUT ROKY ERICKSON
(PALM PICTURES, 94 MINUTES)
www.palmpictures.com
Tune in, turn on, burn out

Among rock's most storied burnouts, Roky Erickson ranks right up there with Brian Wilson and Syd Barrett. Acid overload and mental illness took a formidable toll on the demonically wailing singer of Texas' godlike Thirteenth Floor Elevators, and though he still walks the earth—albeit with an Ozzy-like hobble—and occasionally makes music, he's basically been out to lunch since the late '60s.

How Erickson came to reside in a near-permanent fog, disheveled and discombobulated, is the focus of Keven McAlester's *You're Gonna Miss Me*. The film, which takes its title from the Elevators' only charting single, is as much a study of a family beyond dysfunction as a character study. Its overriding implication is that Erickson's prolonged inability to overcome his sorry situation lies primarily with his wacko mother, with whom Roky spends an inordinate amount of time. A former singer herself, Evelyn Erickson posts yellowing news clippings of her son's arrests and institutionalizations on her wall and isn't fazed when Roky turns on every sound-producing gizmo in the house, the only way he can get any peace.

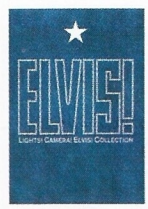
It's all very entertaining, but the film's flaw is a presumption that Erickson's level of renown equals that of Brian Wilson and Syd Barrett. Tributes are paid via Billy Gibbons, Patti Smith and others, and choice vintage clips are rolled, but *You're Gonna Miss Me* fails to explain convincingly the role that Roky and the Elevators played in defining psychedelia, before the rot set in.

There is a happy ending when guardianship is granted to Roky's brother Sumner, hinting at a better life to come. But, as one of Erickson's ex-wives offers, this was someone "comfortable in his psychosis," and those unfamiliar with Erickson prior to viewing are likely to come away from *You're Gonna Miss Me* thinking that not only they, but perhaps even Erickson, missed little.

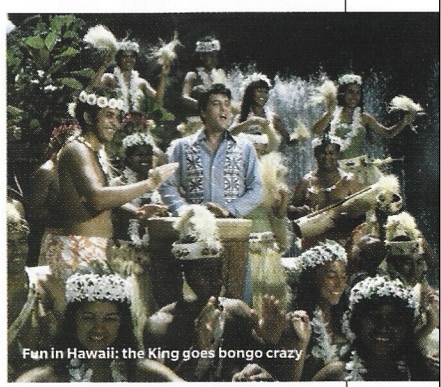
Special features: Deleted scenes, performance footage, Roky today, more. JEFF TAMARKIN

ELVIS PRESLEY

LIGHTS! CAMERA! ELVIS! COLLECTION
(PARAMOUNT HOME VIDEO, 792 MINUTES)
www.paramount.com
THIS IS ELVIS: SPECIAL EDITION
(WARNER HOME VIDEO, 246 MINUTES)
whv.warnerbros.com
Highs and lows of the cinematic King



There's a moment in *This Is Elvis* when the narrator—an "Elvis Tribute Artist"—notes with some resignation, "While I was making those silly movies, the Beatles were conquering America." It's revealing that even a product sanctioned by Presley's estate has to admit that The King's cinematic career wasn't all it could (or should) have been. In the *Lights!* 8-DVD collection you can even pinpoint the moment when it all goes wrong: after *King Creole*, easily the best Presley film, he was sucked up into the army and spit out as the neutered lead of *G.I. Blues*, trading rebellious image for sitcom antics (babysitting!). Sadly, *Blue Hawaii* locked in the formula, but there's still campy fun in

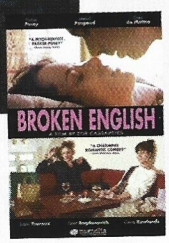

Fun in Hawaii: the King goes bongo crazy

films like *Fun in Acapulco* and *Roustabout*. *This Is Elvis*' two-disc set mixes together re-enactments with real footage; the re-enactments haven't aged well, but the bona fide stuff captures Elvis in all his fierce glory (the 1956 TV performance of

NO SUCH THING AS DUDE FLICKS

Zoe Cassavetes manhandles Manhattan romance and mom.

Zoe Cassavetes (L), with *Broken English*'s Parker Posey and Justin Theroux



WHEN ZOE CASSAVETES made her directorial debut with *Broken English*, your friendly narrator told her that she managed to make a fashion-forward 30-something Manhattan-gal romance with Parker Posey, Drea de Matteo and Gena Rowlands (her mom; John Cassavetes is her pop) that wasn't *In Her Shoes*-y tripe. "I particularly don't like that stuff either," says Zoe, as to why she eschewed the "chick-flick" mentality so to make such a snarky yet tender girl-conscious story. The one-time MTV *House of Style* director ("Still like clothes; just don't dig fashion") wanted her debut to be organic girl-filled and sharply smart. "There's no such thing as dude flicks! Besides, I guess I had something darker in mind." So Zoe nailed dark femme-centricity nicely and with ease. "I got that from my parents' art and work—what they did was pretty alluring."

I'm not trying to dis Parker Posey, but how did you pull such a nuanced mature performance from her?

You know, I've always been such a fan of her work that it never occurred to me that she couldn't. She's such a great comedienne [that] she doesn't... get offered roles with such depth. We connected instantly... The trust she had in me, I think allowed her to go to those places because she had to be so vulnerable. It was great that we did connect.

You go. Because this could've all turned mushy.

I do like romance and I do like personal stories about people getting over that hump. It was daunting to do. But I'm real sarcastic and honest; even dark, I suppose.

I saw that you used a bit of *In a Lonely Place* in *Broken English*. Were the more stylized flicks of the '50s and '40s an influence?

They were; especially because they had such strong women in the lead. At the very least, I borrowed their feeling. I didn't want this to be a chick flick. But I couldn't have written this if there weren't some personal pieces of me in this.

You filmed Beastie Boys videos and fashion industry commercials. You even did an electronic press kit for Chromeo. You like keeping your hand in the music and fashion biz?

[*laughs*] I take every job I have... with the same approach: learn a lot. Find a story. Make it organic—what it is, as opposed to what it's not.

Did you push your mom around?

I manhandled her! [*laughs*] No. We had long conversations about what it all would be. But that's what having a conversation with Gena Rowlands the actress is about, without being about mom and daughter. There was a lot of talk about loneliness and the difference in generations and how too much freedom in our generation isn't always so great. Too confusing. Her generation didn't have a lot of choices, but she went against the grain.

So did your dad.

I know. A.D. AMOROSI

"Hound Dog" that outraged America) and sad decline (a rambling late-'70s version of "Are You Lonesome Tonight?").

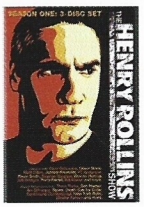
Special features: *This Is Elvis* has both the 1981 and 1983 cuts; "Behind the Gates of Graceland" featurette. GILLIAN G. GAAR

THE HENRY ROLLINS SHOW: SEASON ONE

(GENIUS PRODUCTS, 600 MINUTES)

www.geniusproducts.com

Walkin' the walk, talkin' the talk



Heralded as "the coolest talk show on the planet" by *TV Guide*, this is 10 hours of Bush-bashing, irreverent humor, more Bush-bashing and solid interviews and music performances. Rollins' guests for provocative and insightful interviews include filmmakers (Oliver Stone, Werner Herzog, Kevin Smith, Penelope Spheeris), actors (Jeff Bridges, Eddie Izzard, Michael Chiklis, Billy Bob Thornton), and notable musicians (Chuck D, Ozzy Osbourne, Perry Farrell). Musical guests include Frank Black, Ben Harper, Aimee Mann, John Doe, Dinosaur Jr., Thom Yorke, New York Dolls, and the mighty Rollins Band. Rollins is never one to hold back and segments such as "Letters From" (in which he indicts/entreats public figures) along with his take-no-prisoner "Teeing Off" rants are TV at its best, and *The Henry Rollins Show* isn't your typical talk show.

Special features: None.

JOSE MARTINEZ

ELVIS COSTELLO

LIVE: A CASE FOR SONG

(RHINO, 90 MINUTES)

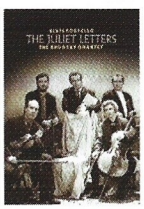
ELVIS COSTELLO AND THE BRODSKY QUARTET

THE JULIET LETTERS

(RHINO, 53 MINUTES)

www.rhino.com

Didn't we just review Elvis?



Although he's widely regarded nowadays as the chunky guy with the receding hairline what snagged goddess Diana Krall (not to mention more tribute effort drop-ins than Ben Vereen), there was a time when Costello seemingly did whatever he pleased: the Nineties. Yes, Costello toyed with country before and opera after. But the objet d'art of 1993's *Juliet Letters* was his first radical departure from pop: a parlor-bound chamber-classical gem wherein Costello wears several tuxedos and sings imagined professorially wordy impressions in his hoarse cackle-croon. Juliet? Wherefore art thou liking "I Almost Had a Weakness?" Not the point really; it's more fun watching Costello looking serious in explaining his *Letters*' desires and the Brodskys wrigglingly discussing him discussing said desires.

1997's BBC Studios-filmed *A Case for Song* attempts to wrangle several of the decade's oddball formations and his past's punkish pop into one pretty package. The Attractions? Brilliant. Turning "Pump it Up" into

Slayer's Tom Araya

frazzled garage rock spiked by an accordion? Dashing. But damned if EC doesn't invite the Brodskys and the White City Septet to muck up everything. Still, Costello's coarse vocalizing on the slowly atmospheric "Shipbuilding" and "Pills and Soap" (to say nothing of Brian Wilson's "God Only Knows") is something to see.

Special features: None.

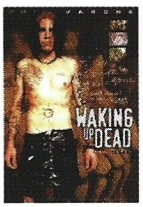
A.D. AMOROSI

WAKING UP DEAD

(MUSIC VIDEO DISTRIBUTORS, 90 MINUTES)

www.mvdb2b.com

Cinema du rehabbe



These days it pays to put your spectacular personal wipeouts on display (see: Tom Sizemore, Danny Bonaduce). Ex-Saigon Kick and Skid Row drummer Phil Varone's motivations appear more altruistic (just say no, kids). He is, essentially, the same lumbering trainwreck we've seen in *Breaking Bonaduce* and *Shooting Sizemore*, just with a lower Q score and more willpower, maybe even more sincerity. Filmed through four years of his life touring with Skid Row, Varone reflects on ten years of

fuckups and fuckings-over with Saigon Kick, and how the once-sober kid with a bright future in architectural drafting became a beer-swilling, blow-snorting, borderline deadbeat dad and flatlined bag o' crap. Seeing what he threw away while chasing strange and cheap/not-so-cheap thrills is painful, but thankfully moreso to our hero, who evidently finally turns over that new leaf, using it to wipe the foam from the corners of his mouth, and ultimately quit rock 'n' roll to reclaim his past glory as a father and human being.

Special features: Unavailable at press time.

RANDY HARWARD

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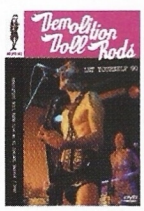
Taking Spain one scummy band at a time



Spanish label Munster has been fomenting 'n' foisting garage and punk for a quarter century but, instinctively divining that to understand *real* trash ya gotta see it, too, has now entered the live DVD fray. Boy, has it *ever*. The batch at hand—plus forthcoming titles from Nomads, Supersuckers, Bob Log III and more, all featuring pro sound and multicam mixes filmed in Madrid '06—fairly oozes bodily fluids.

Australia's long-running scum merchants the Beasts of Bourbon, for example, are in fine fetid form, singer Tex Perkins thrashing about like some unholy cross between Nick Cave and Jon Spencer while his bandmates churn up a swamp-skronk maelstrom on such delicate ditties as "Hard for You" and "Straight, Hard and Long." Detroit's glam/garage sex workers the Demolition Doll Rods aim for a visual aesthetic—two gals and one guy performing in bikinis and lingerie, natch—and you come away feeling deliciously unclean, in a mood to hump the nearest upright object. And Atlanta buzz-band the Black Lips, the most traditionally "garage" outfit here, get down and get sweaty; lo-fi sound for this one, but that's offset by close-ups of tight jeans-encased crotches.

Special features: Discographies, photo galleries, videos (in particular, the Beasts' vids from the '80s are crude, cruddy classics). FRED MILLS

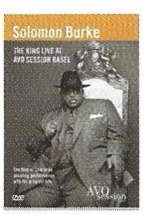
SOLOMON BURKE

THE KING LIVE AT AVO SESSION BASEL

(MUSIC VIDEO DISTRIBUTORS, 75 MINUTES)

www.mvdb2b.com

One of the last true soul greats



For some inexplicable reason history will some day have to answer to, Solomon Burke, though a giant in the '60s R&B world, never quite crossed over to pop to the extent that peers like Wilson Pickett and Joe Tex did. But Burke, who's long doubled as a Reverend—which may explain why bands like the Stones, who covered two of his songs, revered him—is one of few from that era still going and, if this spectacular 2003 Swiss performance is typical, he may just now be at the top of his game. Perched firmly but hardly motionless on his throne, decked out regally, clutching not only his microphone but a long-stem rose and a hanky to wipe the flow of sweat, Burke owns the stage. His voice, a little bit country, a little more church, even more soul, is still as forceful, as supersized, as he is. Mixing it up between hits (a wicked "Cry to Me"), classics ("Georgia on My Mind") and new material provided by Tom Waits ("Diamond in Your Mind") and Brian Wilson ("Soul Searchin'"), Burke is not just the living king of soul, he's its reigning ambassador.

Special features: Behind-the-scenes footage.

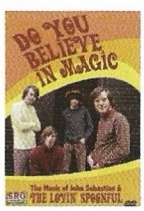
JEFF TAMARKIN

DO YOU BELIEVE IN MAGIC: THE MUSIC OF JOHN SEBASTIAN & THE LOVIN' SPOONFUL

(SRO ENTERTAINMENT, 65 MINUTES)

www.kultur.com

Magical hit factory tour

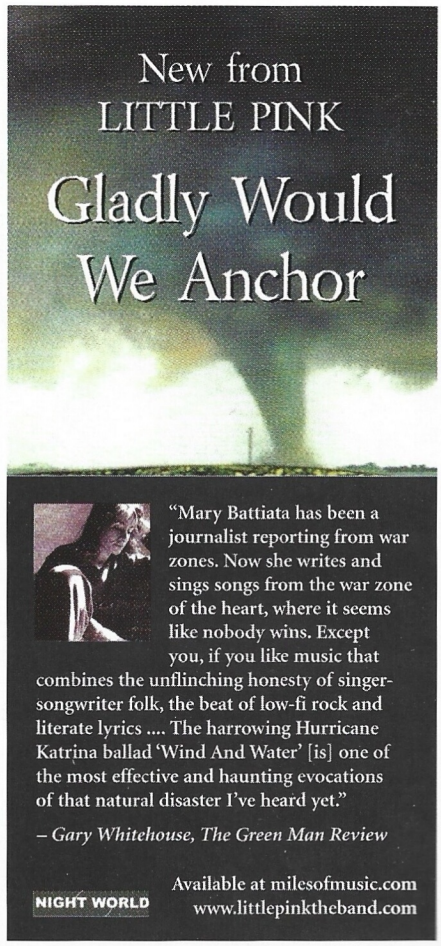


Both John Sebastian and this ostensibly made-for-television program have barely more spunk than a Mr. Rogers episode. But it's still, for those of us who hold the hit-making, feel-good sounds of the Lovin' Spoonful in high esteem or are casually aware of these tunes that have so thoroughly permeated our culture, a nice guided tour through a healthy section of rock history. With Sebastian as host, we're taken through the inspiration and creation of the Spoonful's many hits (including its signature hit "Do You Believe in Magic?," based on an early Spoonful epiphany) and Sebastian's surprise

Do you believe in...the Lovin' Spoonful

comeback number, "Welcome Back" (which you'd know as the theme to the classic 1970s sitcom *Welcome Back Kotter*). The songs and stories sandwiched between these two career milemarkers shed light on the band's inspiration and influence, but also put the songs into perspective, showing that the good feelings we get from them are the same that gave them birth.

Special features: Commentary, additional scenes, snippets of interviews with late Spoonful guitarist Zal Yanovsky and Steve Boone as well as the Mamas and the Papas' Denny Doherty. RANDY HARWARD



"Mary Battiata has been a journalist reporting from war zones. Now she writes and sings songs from the war zone of the heart, where it seems like nobody wins. Except you, if you like music that combines the unflinching honesty of singer-songwriter folk, the beat of low-fi rock and literate lyrics .... The harrowing Hurricane Katrina ballad 'Wind And Water' [is] one of the most effective and haunting evocations of that natural disaster I've heard yet."

– Gary Whitehouse, The Green Man Review

NIGHT WORLD

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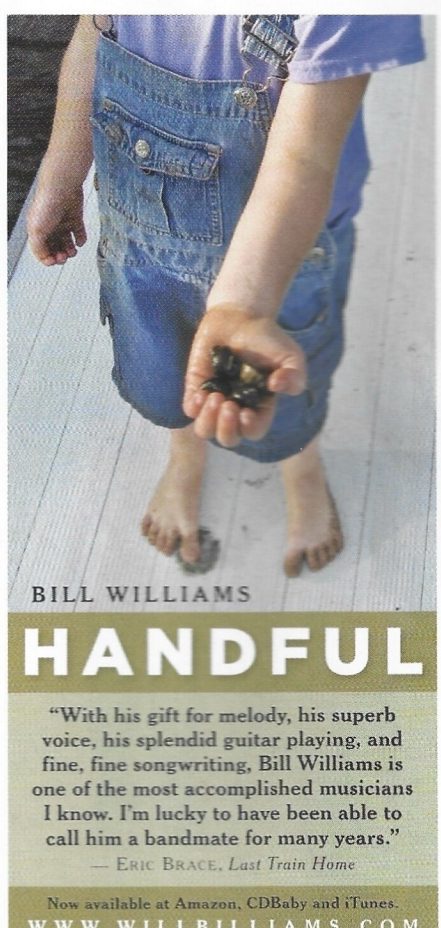

"With his gift for melody, his superb voice, his splendid guitar playing, and fine, fine songwriting, Bill Williams is one of the most accomplished musicians I know. I'm lucky to have been able to call him a bandmate for many years."

— ERIC BRACE, *Last Train Home*

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Sept 05	Carrboro, NC	@ Cat's Cradle
Sept 06	Washington DC	@ Black Cat
Sept 07	Philadelphia, PA	@ Theatre of Living Arts
Sept 08	New York, NY	@ Webster Hall
Sept 09	Boston, MA	@ Paradise Rock Club
Sept 11	Cleveland, OH	@ Grog Shop
Sept 12	Chicago, IL	@ Metro
Sept 16	Austin, TX	@ Austin City Limits
Sept 20	Houston, TX	@ Numbers
Sept 24	Phoenix, AZ	@ Rhythm Room
Sept 25	Los Angeles, CA	@ Henry Fonda Theatre
Seot 26	San Diego, CA	@ Belly Up Tavern
Sept 27	San Francisco, CA	@ Great American Music Hall
Sept 29	Portland, OR	@ Doug Fir
Sept 30	Seattle, WA	@ Crocodile Café
Oct 02	Denver, CO	@ Bluebird Theatre
Oct 03	Lawrence, KS	@ Jackpot

The Trials of
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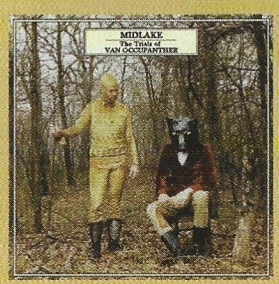

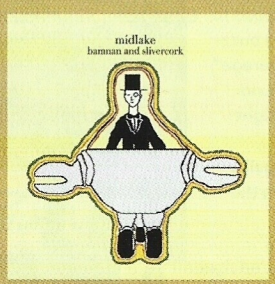

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THE ALLIANCE ROCKS

WHO IS THIS

Tall tales and iconic images from the eye of the hurricane

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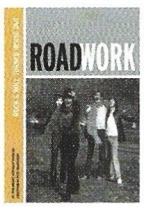
Roadwork: Rock & Roll Turned Inside Out

BY TOM WRIGHT WITH SUSAN VANHECKE

(HAL LEONARD) www.halleonard.com

Thru a lens, darkly



In the spring of 1962, American-born Tom Wright, studying photography at London's Ealing Arts College, met a graphic design student named Pete Townshend. As Wright recalls in the introduction to his new photo collection, "I turned [Townshend] on to American blues and pot. He introduced me to a rock and roll rebirth." Thus an enduring friendship was forged, Wright going on to become the Who's tour photographer and Townshend eventually penning the foreword to *Roadwork*. Of Wright's lensman's eye, notes Townshend, "He seemed to sense the approaching warp in time that predicted that something special would happen."

Indeed, scores of memorably candid Who pics dot this 304-page volume: a bleary-eyed Townshend in his bathrobe; Roger Daltrey about to clutch the tit of a buxom groupie; Keith Moon in mid-demolition of his drum-kit. There are also classic images of the Stones, Faces, Eagles, James Gang, Elvis Costello (Wright accompanied the Attractions on their first U.S. tour) and assorted Detroit musicians (a very young Bob Seger, a surly-looking Ted Nugent with his Amboy Dukes, the MC5 rehearsing, etc.) from the 1968-69 period when Wright managed the legendary Grande Ballroom venue.

But *Road Work* is more than a coffee-table book. It's also a memoir of a life spent (and frequently misspent) in the eye of the rock hurricane. Alcohol and chemical abuse no doubt contributed to the massive heart attack that Wright suffered in 2005, but thankfully he survived to tell his tales. From unflinching recollections of rock's grand characters ("Elvis [Costello] was a goofball... Iggy Pop [had] all the charm of an overturned garbage can... [the MC5] dashed to the dressing room where the girls waited with lightning-fast oral sex...") to outrageous in-the-trenches anecdotes (such as when he helped Keith Moon escape the clutches of a promoter's goons who took exception to the drummer's onstage pyrotechnics display),

MC5

Wright's stories are every bit as candid and memorable as his photography.

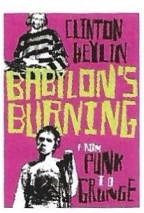
FRED MILLS

Babylon's Burning: From Punk to Grunge

BY CLINTON HEYLIN

(CANONGATE) www.groveatlantic.com

Beyond the valley of *From the Velvets to the Voidoids*



Babylon's Burning is a sequel/expanded version of Clinton Heylin's 1993 classic *From the Velvets to the Voidoids*. Heylin illuminates his motives in the new book's acknowledgements, referring to the project as "a case of unfinished business," and, more pointedly, an attempt to redress the wrongs he sees in other books that cover the period, written by folks who Heylin sees as viewing events through "bias bifocals."

Not that the author doesn't have his own biases. But he also has a demonstrable penchant for in-depth research and seeking out hitherto unseen connections between seemingly disparate events (finding the links between punk scenes in New York, London, Cleveland, and Australia, for example). Tie that to a writing style laced with an understated dry wit, and the end result is a highly compelling and fully realized

Steve Krakow

SUZY POLING

chronicle of the period. Heylin's primary agenda is in covering events in as detailed a fashion as possible, and at over 600 pages, the story is happily able to unfurl at its own speed. Unlike some writers (perhaps those wearing the bias bifocals), Heylin finds the story in those details rather than in heavy-handed analysis laid on through hindsight.

But despite the "To Grunge" reference in the book's subtitle, Heylin overwhelmingly keeps the focus on the '70s; the years from 1980 to 1994 are covered in less than 100 pages. Which is a shame, as it'd be interesting to turn those research skills to these later years. Maybe in *Volume 2*? GILLIAN G. GAAR

Galactic Zoo Dossier #7

BY STEVE KRAKOW

(DRAG CITY) www.dragcity.com

104 pages + 2 CDs + 72 trading cards = fun!

For five-plus years, *Galactic Zoo Dossier*—Chicagoan Steve "Plastic Crimewave" Krakow's singular obsession—has essayed all things Terrastock-ic. Krakow's shown his deep abiding congress with psychedelic-everything by overrunning each page's borders (almost) with his own pen-and-ink sketches done in several styles (his Crumb-like representational lines are best) as well as his keenly historic texts. The stylized black-n-white 'zine with the colorful slick cover makes no apologies for its juvenilia (when it occurs) or its hyper-puppy adoration. Krakow and his occasional co-contributors are dipped in terrapin and unembarrassed. Die-cut trading cards dedicated to "Guitar Gods" and "Astral Folk Goddesses"? Check. Past issue features on the likes of Edgar Broughton and interviews with Damo Suzuki? Check. Free CDs of "rare psychs and stomps"? Check.

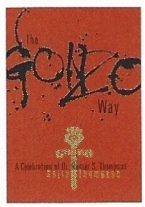
Package number seven (it's hard to call something so sturdy feeling a 'zine) dives right in, with photo ads for Tim Buckley and fur-lined Kaftan East coats the likes of which could've lined any East Village or San Fran or Munich broadsheet back in the day. While Jessicat the Psychedelic Pscientist handles an appreciation of Julie Tippets, and Scott Wilkinson pens a Tosches-worthy essay on the blues influence on garage rock, Plastic Crimewave etches deeply the likes of Motown lessers (but greaters, in psych circles) such as Edwin Starr and Undisputed Truth. He also tackles lions such as Donovan and Tiny Tim, then chats up the classical gassers from the Strawbs and that great oddball, Kevin Coyne. And while I'm uncertain to whom I'll trade my colorful, coated Mary Hopkin "Goddess" or my Phil Manzanera "Damaged Guitar God" (unless someone has a spare John Renbourn, dammit!), I'll be playing my 2CDs of *Teenage Meadows of Infinity/ From the Ashes!* from Dev Banhart, Acid Mothers Temple, the Stooges and even Crimewave himself (doing "Willie Th' Pimp") for everyone to hear. *GZD7* is obsession at its psilocybin-laced finest. A.D. AMOROSI

The Gonzo Way: A Celebration of Dr. Hunter S. Thompson

BY ANITA THOMPSON

(FULCRUM) www.fulcrumbooks.com

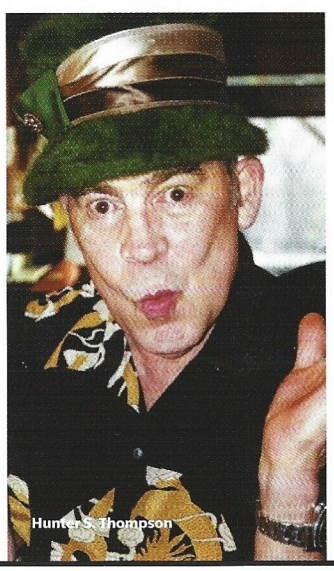
Fear and loathing in letters



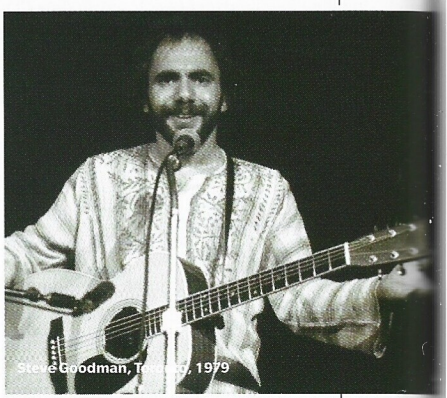
Anita Thompson is one of those people forever destined to live in the shadow of a spouse. She's the much-younger wife of the late Hunter S. Thompson—Dr. Gonzo himself, rebel American journalist and raving intellectual. Embracing her role as the Missus, the little lady lovingly compiled a book, *The Gonzo Way: A Celebration of Dr. Hunter S. Thompson*.

It's not a tell-all. In fact, Anita's stingy about personal details of her life with Hunter, instead quoting heavily his older cronies, such as Ed Bradley. She thinks they knew him better. That's probably true, considering how late she came into Hunter's life. And the anecdotes she's collected about the joy he took in firearms, practical jokes and politics do help humanize the walking embodiment of sex, drugs and rock 'n' roll. Yet it's frustrating that for most of the book, Anita tells Hunter's story at such a distance, glossing over those times when he must have been hard to live with.

To be fair, she warns early on that this totally unsalacious book is meant to be a guide to living the Gonzo way, of which Hunter is naturally Buddha. There are seven tenets to the philosophy. They basically boil down to learning, enjoying your work and getting involved in politics—not necessarily while under the influence of copious amounts of drugs and alcohol. (Anita says she had young readers in mind as she wrote.) The entire blueprint lasts no more than 90 pages and is part biography, part self-help book and all propaganda. Sure, her husband was one of America's greatest minds. But the fawning way Anita refers to him, in paragraphs that aren't particularly well organized, seems exaggerated, if not naïve. CRYSTAL K. WIEBE


Hunter S. Thompson

COURTESY ECW PRESS

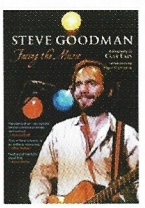

Steve Goodman, Toronto, 1979

Steve Goodman: Facing the Music

BY CLAY EALS

(ECW PRESS) www.ecwpress.com

First, final and *long* word on the folkie



These kinds of survival stories are the stuff of which Oprah and Lifetime TV movies are made: Diagnosed with leukemia, a young man of 20 ignores impending doom and keeps plugging for another 15 years, undeterred, determined to make something of himself. Usually these yarns are maudlin and weepy, and though they are engineered to tug at the heartstrings, they more often than not feel exploitive. Maybe that's because the subjects of those tales didn't write really funny songs like "A Dying Cub Fan's Last Request," poignant ones like "Banana Republics" and one that just about everyone knows, "City of New Orleans," made famous by Arlo Guthrie.

Steve Goodman's story is one worth telling. The Chicago-based singer-songwriter was one of the most intelligent, perceptive and humorous of his ilk. He was never hugely famous but he was loved, both by a sizable coterie of fans and by fellow performers. He was also prolific—knowing

COURTESY ANITA THOMPSON

that his time would be short, Goodman wrote, recorded and performed feverishly during his career, which ended when he finally succumbed in 1984.

All of that material has given author Clay Eals plenty to write about, so much so that he's penned a two-inch-thick, 780-page biography that, it's safe to say, will serve as the definitive take on this respected artist. Eals interviewed more than 1,000 people for the book: dozens of artists, friends and family, even Hillary Clinton, a classmate of Goodman's. That it's a thorough portrait goes without saying—virtually every move the guy made is accounted for and expounded upon.

Whether it's too much of a portrait is another matter. As likable and durable as Goodman's work is, and as breezy and occasionally riveting as *Face the Music* is, an account of this heft would need some judicious editing to appeal to any but the most predisposed fan. JEFF TAMARKIN

My First Time: A Collection of First Punk Show Stories

EDITED BY CHRIS DUNCAN

(AK PRESS) www.akpress.org

Bustin' your cherry in the mosh pit

The book's guileless title says it all, about not just the *what* but the *how*. Forty-plus contributors offer short essays that relate what it was like the first time they stepped outside the mainstream and into the mosh pit. The details change from piece to piece—the Circle Jerks in New York, the Dead Kennedys in Berkeley; beer-soaked here, straight-edge there—but the basic theme remains the same: social misfit finds acceptance in opposition, gabba gabba hey. Some of the essays are journalistic, some are confessional, but all are utterly without pretense or grandiosity.

That's as it should be, I suppose, and the fact that the most famous contributor is probably music writer Michael Azerrad (whose essay was added after our advance proof was sent out) is also in keeping with punk's DIY ethos. A few of the essays are memorable: Steven Sciscenti's honest admission that he thought the Ramones sucked when he first saw them in 1977 (although it was at Milwaukee's Summerfest and not, as he calls it, the "Wisconsin Music Festival"); Jillian Lauren's wonderful recollection that at her first hardcore show she "had already been knocked unconscious and probably fallen in love at the same time." And any of them will bring a flash of recognition to serious fans of rock 'n' roll, from Little Richard on forward. But the sum total effect is that there's nothing terribly special about any of them.

After all, that DIY ethos holds true better in theory than in practice: Just because anyone can do it doesn't mean that every punk show is as good as the next. Nothing personal, folks; you wouldn't want to read about my first time, either. ERIC SCHUMACHER-RASMUSSEN

The Heroin Diaries: A Year in the Life of a Shattered Rock Star

BY NIKKI SIXX WITH IAN GITTINS

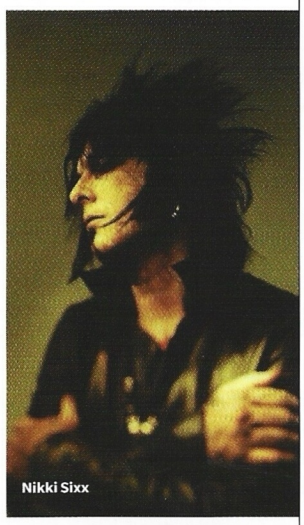
(MTV/VH1 POCKET BOOKS)

www.simonsays.com

12-step program for sleazeballs

Motley Crüe's 2001 autobiography *The Dirt* is still the benchmark by which chronicles of rock debauchery are measured. So what compels Crüe bassist Nikki Sixx to go beyond that tell-all and *tell more*? Well, he's been clean and sober for some time now, and many former alkies 'n' addicts have in their character makeup both a grandiose streak and a compulsive need to confess. And celebrities know they can sell those confessions.

Ergo, *The Heroin Diaries*, taking you from December '86 through December '87, during which time Sixx rewrote the book (pun intended) on personal excess, culminating in a Christmastime O.D. and a near-death experience for Sixx. During that time he also kept a diary and now, with British writer Ian Gittins fleshing things out through interviews with the other Crüe musicians, associates and managers, friends and girlfriends (among them, Prince's ex, Vanity, who is now an evangelist and gets in some of the book's most bizarre quotes), Sixx reconstructs that year in graphic detail. His account is every bit as lurid as *The Dirt*—the book's blood-splattered, almost-X-rated graphic design is pretty vivid,


Nikki Sixx

too—and, at times, horrifying. Here's a little bump to give you a taste:

"I fucked the chick, then when she passed out I went to the bathroom and started shooting coke and china white. When I came out of the bathroom and saw this girl passed out on my bed and a guy unconscious on the couch, I lost my mind. I thought people were coming to get me, so I threw all my drugs out the window."

Sixx is selling more than just a book. He recently started a chi-chi line of rocker-dude clothing called Royal Underground, and he's also got a hard-rocking new CD, *The Heroin Diaries* (10th Street Entertainment) that, with its spoken-word interludes adapted from the book and lyrics that more or less follow its narrative arc of crash, burn and recovery, is the aural equivalent of a 12-Step Program For Recovering Sleazeballs.

But *The Heroin Diaries* is equally about atonement. "If one person reads this book and doesn't have to go down the same road as me," writes Sixx, "it was worth sharing my personal hell with them." Sixx previously established a charity called Running Wild In The Night to help runaway kids and will be donating part of his book's profits to it. As he puts it, "I believe that you can be cool as fuck, not give a fuck and fucking kick ass in life, and not be fucked up." To that we can only say—*fuckin' A.* FRED MILLS

"Masterfully blends folk, blues, and pop into a tasty, rootsy stew... His is an original and most welcome voice."
-- *Amplifier Magazine*

Rich McCulley

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THE LUCKY TOMBLIN BAND
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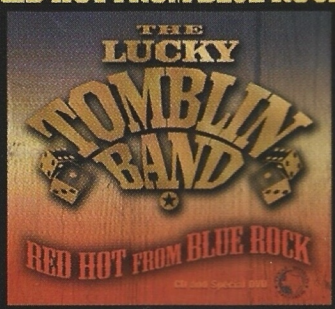

Lucky Tomblin: lead vocals
Earl Poole Ball: piano & lead vocals
Redd Volkaert: lead guitar & lead vocals
Sarah Brown: bass & lead vocals
John Reed: lead guitar & lead vocals
Bobby Arnold: acoustic guitar& lead vocals
Jon Hahn: drums

Texas World Records - Burnside Distribution

ON SALE SEPT 12, 2007

www.luckytomblinband.com

Continued from page 78

Golden Girls, Mr. Belvedere, Roseanne, Baywatch and *Growing Pains* on her resume, not to mention several film roles (including 1989's *Troop Beverly Hills* and 1998's *Pleasantville*). She also boasts of working with Emmanuel Lewis.

"But I've met Michael J. Fox," counters Sennett. "That's pretty legit."

Says Lewis, "I just did it for way longer, so I have more experience."

It's in moments like these where they get into a rhythm and that compatibility becomes once again undeniable. The 30-year-old Lewis and Sennett (four years her senior) began writing together more than a decade ago when acting was still their bread and butter. "We would work on these songs for hours and hours, just the two of us," says Lewis, "and eventually we had like 30 or 40 songs, and we would do these little mini performances in my living room [in Hollywood]. I lived with these two roommates, and their friends would come over, and we would do these little shows, and people really liked our songs... That was important for us, realizing that our friends were interested in what we were doing."

"Yeah, around that time, people used the words 'dope' and 'ill' a lot, and I feel like we heard a lot of that," deadpans Sennett. "'Oh, that sounds ill.' Our friends thought we were cool, and that was fun."

Despite handing out self-made flyers at shows by bands like Phantom Planet, for what seemed like the longest time, it was those friends—and pretty much those friends alone—who would support Rilo Kiley at their gigs at 21-and-over clubs like Spaceland. But when they did an all-ages release party for their debut, *Take Offs and Landings*, at the Knitting Factory in L.A., the tide seemed to shift.

"We had done this secret show opening for Weezer," recalls Sennett, "and a bunch of kids had seen us there. But we didn't think much of it, so when we played the Knitting Factory, a bunch of our friends showed up—like they always do—but all these 16-year-old kids showed up, too, and I remember thinking, 'Oh, wow, there are people who want to see us, who we don't know.'"

As their band began to take off, both Sennett and Lewis tried to bury their acting past: "Wouldn't you?" she says. "I mean, there's nothing worse than a child actor turned something else. We wanted to just show people that our music was actually worthwhile, and that's a heavy cross to bear, the child-actor path. So I think we wanted to wipe the slate clean. A lot of people had no idea until coming to see us maybe the third or fourth time and having a friend say, 'Hey, did you know that dude was in dot, dot, dot...'"

"THERE'S NOTHING WORSE THAN A CHILD ACTOR TURNED SOMETHING ELSE. WE WANTED TO JUST SHOW PEOPLE THAT OUR MUSIC WAS ACTUALLY WORTHWHILE, AND THAT'S A HEAVY CROSS TO BEAR."

Since garnering glowing reviews for her solo records and Rilo's second and third albums, Lewis at least has come to terms with past: "There was a turning point for me. I realized

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as a more grown-up woman that some of what I did as a child is incredibly cool and unique, which inevitably informed my songwriting. So I think I had a lot of experiences that very few people have had. And part of that is worth talking about. But, initially, I felt like a giant nerd."

Considering her undeniable sex appeal and her band's steadily rising popularity—and the fact that the likes of Drew Barrymore consider themselves fans—one might think that scripts are starting to pile up for Lewis again. "Nope, no one has called," she laughs. "I get some requests, 'Do you wanna come be in my terrible student film for no money in the desert for nine weeks.' If something was super cool, I would be into it, but I just don't know if I'm a very good actress, that's the problem."

And, ironically, for both Lewis and Sennett, the future of Rilo Kiley isn't necessarily on any firmer ground than the promise of acting in the future. When they talk about the band's future beyond this album, both couldn't be more noncommittal: "I truly can't say what's going to happen," says Lewis, noting that she would be happy with making records on her own, or as the lead singer of Rilo Kiley. "Hopefully, whatever feels best will outlive the others. Whatever creates a free environment and whatever renders the best records will hopefully be the thing that carries on in the end."

Sennett agrees, saying, "I think the more you try to plan and control things, the less fun and exciting they become. I think you just have to vibe out in life. You know, you just gotta see where the vibe's is at any given moment, and follow that. I think the perfect example of that is a guy like Neil Young, who just leaves in the middle of a CSNY tour because it's just not going well for him."

Says Lewis, "It's rock and roll, if you're not having fun, then..."

"Go get a real job," Sennett says, finishing her sentence. "That way, you'll at least know you'll get paid. Doing this, the only thing you know for certain is that you'll have a good time. So, if you're not having that... 'What's the point?'"

With that, Lewis and Sennett are drifting into lighter, sarcastic banter again, giggling and catching up. As his final thought on *Under the Blacklight*, Sennett quips, "I'd like to tell the people, 'Don't be scared. It's okay,' end quote, full stop. 'Don't be scared, it's okay.'"

After a pause, Lewis smirks, then adds, "I'd just like to say that if people think I'm being too sexy in some of these songs, to them I say this: 'Y'all are cockblocking. I'm just trying to hook me a *man*.'" **H**

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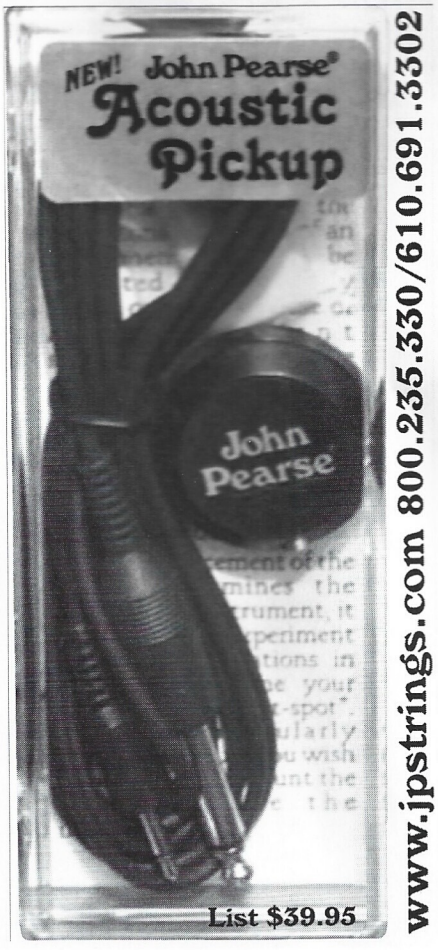


HOW AEROSMITH'S *ROCKS* CHANGED MY LIFE— AS TOLD BY

SLASH

Interview by Randy Harward >> Photo ©Neil Gavin / Retna UK

ALRIGHT, IT WAS Aerosmith's *Rocks*, and I first heard it when I was about 14 years old. I used to race BMX bikes and the older guys put it on, and it just grabbed me—Fuck, this is bad. I only got to hear it for like a second the first time. The second time I heard it was—there was this girl that used to hang around a certain group of friends, and she was probably the best-looking girl in school and in the neighborhood, and she'd just broken up with her boyfriend. I tried desperately to pick this girl up for the longest time, and finally she invited me up to her house.

I was aspiring to get in this girl's pants, more or less, so I go up to her room, and she's got tapestries on the wall and incense and pot, her stereo—a typical teenage girl's room at the time. She put on some records; we listened to Zeppelin; we listened to Yes; and then finally she put this record on that I recognized immediately from like the first fuckin' note.

It was *Rocks*. I must've listened to this record in that girl's—her name was Lori—bedroom probably a half-dozen times, from front to back, over and over again, and I completely ignored her. The whole purpose of my being there completely went out the window. Finally I think she said, "I think it's time for you to go." And I was like, "Okay, see ya." I got on my bike and I took off and she never spoke to me again.

But that record spoke to me in such a way—it was like it embodied everything that I was about, and I had just never heard it put to music. It was raw, it was nasty, it was really rhythmic, it was very sort of drugged out, fuckin' all over the place and [there was] this sort of angst in Steve Tyler's voice. It was the perfect fuckin' hard rock teenage record... like what punk rock was for everybody else at the time. It was the most aggressive, sleazy, guitar-driven, you know... not *angry* record, but like pissed-off party music.

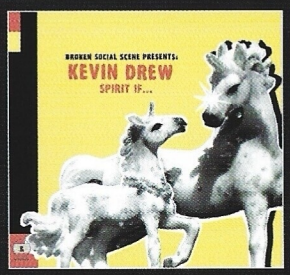
I was sold. And not too long after that, I picked up the guitar and off I went.

Velvet Revolver's Libertad *is out now on RCA Records.*

ARTIST: Aerosmith
ALBUM DATE/TITLE: 1976, *Rocks*
STANDOUTS: "Back in the Saddle," "Nobody's Fault," "Rats in the Cellar," "Sick As a Dog"
FUN FACT: According to RIAA stats, the fourth Aerosmith LP was one of the first albums to ship platinum.

BROKEN SOCIAL SCENE PRESENTS: KEVIN DREW SPIRIT IF...

IN STORES SEPTEMBER 18



Spirit If... is the first in a series of "Broken Social Scene Presents" albums. This solo effort from **Kevin Drew** unfolds like an emotional comic book, returning to the creative process that was the initial spark for BSS.

"Kevin's been trading in seemingly crass sentiments paired with airy pop sounds since the touching ode to semen-swallowing "Lover's Spit" – so the worst pickup line ever actually sounds sorta romantic here. What can we say, Kev's a charmer." – *Stereogum*

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STARS IN OUR BEDROOM AFTER THE WAR

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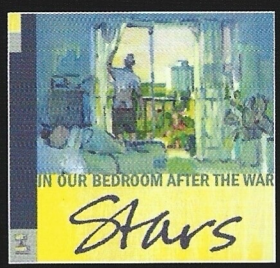

The follow-up to the acclaimed **Set Yourself on Fire.** It's Stars' most confident and compelling work to date. Recorded at the Warehouse Studios in Vancouver, BC and mixed by Joe Chiccarelli (The Shins, Morrissey).

"It broadens the previous album's orchestral scope, opening with wide-screen synths and the hushed back-and-forth of singers Amy Millan and Torquil Campbell." – *Pitchfork Media*

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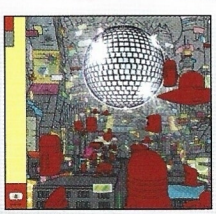

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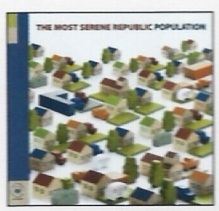

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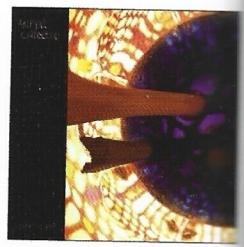

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